THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENCY:

BOND OF DENOMINATIONAL VITALIZATION

ABSTRACT

BODY-BUILDING: THE COMMUNITY LIFE OF THE CABINET

by

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An examination of the intentionally-developed community life of cabinets, this project explores ways corporate experience enriches and informs the work and spiritual formation of district superintendents. The Cabinet of the West Virginia Annual Conference is the primary laboratory, with additional resourcing from similar groups across the United Methodist connection in North America.

Results show a correlation between the strength of the Cabinet's shared life and the superintendents' sense of being nurtured and empowered to do their work. When community exists, superintendents celebrate it; when it is absent, they long for it. Practical suggestions for strengthening the Cabinet's communal life are offered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS i

ABSTRACT ii

INTRODUCTION 1

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: Towel and Basin 5

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 7

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: Hearts and Flowers 17

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CABINET
- Introduction 19
- What It Feels Like From Where I Sit 26
- Things That Have Contributed to the Building of Our Community. 44
- What Could We Do to Further Deepen Our Group Life . . 55
- Making Space for the Holy Spirit 64

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: Travel With Our Blessing 70

INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUAL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS
- Daniel: Only Half the Man He Used to Be 73
- Sue: A Place at the Table 79
- Lawrence: View From the Other End 85

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: Passing the World Around 91

OBSERVATIONS FROM THIRD AND FOURTH YEAR DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS' CONSULTATIONS 93

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY: A Visit from Geraldine 100

HOW OTHER CABINETS BUILD COMMUNITY:
- Results of the Survey of the Bishops 102

SUMMARY 114A

EVALUATIONS 118

APPENDIXES 132

BIBLIOGRAPHY 143

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to many who have helped make it possible for me to complete this project:

United Theological Seminary, for having the vision to call together a group of district superintendents, not only to do Doctor of Ministry work together, but to enrich one another's lives with companionship and support; Mary Olsen and Emerson Colaw, who began as mentors and became friends;

My Bishop, William Boyd Grove, and the Cabinet of the West Virginia Annual Conference, who have provided a community for me to belong to, and have allowed themselves to become the laboratory in which to examine our corporate life. All with whom I have served on the Cabinet have influenced me greatly, but especially I am in the debt of present members: Aslam, Clyde, Daniel, Harry, John C., John William, Lawrence, Leo, Roger, Tom, Wendall, and newcomers Sue and Ralph;

The Wheeling District in which I serve, particularly the pastors, and the Committee on Superintendency who have given me support, encouragement, and extra time to do this project; Peggy Klages, my administrative assistant, who has done all she could to help me complete my work in a timely fashion;

My family: Julian Sulgit, my life's partner, who has picked up extra household responsibilities and paid the tuition bills; our children, Clare and Andrew, who encouraged their mother and even pretended they thought the subject of her project was interesting; Clair and Elsie Jarvis, who first taught me to love learning and the Lord.

Patricia A. Jarvis
Wheeling, West Virginia
May, 1991

INTRODUCTION

A PASSION FOR BODY-BUILDING

Many months ago I began a new adventure with nineteen other district superintendents from across the connection. We were invited to work together for a two year period on a comprehensive subject entitled "The District Superintendency: Bond of Denominational Vitalization." Each of us was to select a project which would be uniquely our own, but which would be related to the more exhaustive title, and contribute to its development.

The advice was given to those of us in the group to begin to discover where "our passion" lay - that subject about which we felt deeply enough to invest some time and energy. "When you discover that," we were informed, "you will have also discovered the subject of your Doctor of Ministries project."

It turned out that my passion lay in the area of community life - more particularly the community life of the Cabinet. During the course of this project I have come to know more profoundly what I already knew deep within myself, intellectually and experientially: we are created not for isolation but for union. To know unity with God, with other people, and with ourselves is the essence of being fully human, and for many if not all of us the main arena in which this is worked on and realized is some form of community experience.

BUILDING THE BODY FOR THE CABINET'S SAKE

I have a teenage son, Andrew. Like many boys his age he is very concerned about the development of his body, and spends hours at our local YMCA using the Nautilus machines and free weights. He is careful about what he eats - quite a lot different than when he was in junior high school. He keeps up on the latest literature regarding body-building. Andrew's reward for all this is a beautiful, functional body that serves him well.

Those of us who are privileged to serve as district superintendents know that we, as other Christians, are baptized into the living Body of Jesus Christ: the Church. During the years of our superintendency, the most intimate manifestation of that Body will probably be found in the particular cabinet of which we are a part. If we and the Bishops with whom we serve understand the importance and potential of that community, and go about its development with the same energy and intentionality as Andrew, perhaps our reward will also be a beautiful, functional Body - one that honors the Lord whom we serve, and nourishes and empowers us for our challenging ministry.

BUILDING THE BODY FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHURCH

There occurs to me another reason for deliberate Body-building: we have opportunity to serve as a model of Christian community to

pastors and congregations. If groups as diverse as cabinets generally are can form community, why not Christians everywhere? If is true that district superintendents do best in the context of a covenant community that works and worships together, would the same not also be true for pastors and parishioners?

While congregational life and cabinet life are not identical, there are sufficient similarities. We can learn about one from observations about the other. Whenever there are moments of true community - indeed, whenever we as Christians genuinely seek after it - Heaven must rejoice. For an instant the curtain has been parted, and we have experienced a foretaste of that time when our unity will be complete.

BODY-BUILDERS I HAVE KNOWN AND LOVED

A major part of this project is centered around the corporate life of the current Cabinet in the West Virginia Annual Conference, of which I am a part. This Cabinet has been the primary laboratory in which community has been explored. Nearly eight hours of group discussion, self-observation and analysis, memories, and shared reflections have been condensed into the section entitled "Conversations With the Cabinet." An already much-appreciated group life has been enhanced by our deliberately taking some time to think and talk about it.

In addition, three Cabinet members agreed to participate in an individual interview, to provide some highly focused personal perspectives on our life together. One was chosen because she is at the very beginning of her superintendency; another was invited because he is at the end of his term. One more was selected due to some special, life-changing circumstances that have happened to him while he has been a Cabinet member.

Scattered throughout the paper are "Images of Community." These are small narrative samplings taken from the recent life of our Cabinet. They are intended to be a momentary drawing back of the window curtain to allow another kind of glimpse of our life together. There are more ways to know us than by what we say about ourselves.

The Cabinet offers our story as a resource for other cabinets and groups within the Christian family, knowing that like anything organic, we are changing. The group is not the same as we were two years ago; we are not the same as we will be two years in the future. Yet we offer who we believe ourselves to be at this moment, not because we are perfected, but as a witness to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY
Towel and Basin

It is Maundy Thursday morning. Outside the window of our meeting room an April rain weeps softly. The Cabinet has been in session several long, appointment-making days at a state park in the Parkersburg District. We are weary, not only with our labor, but additionally burdened with the solemnity of Holy Week, and of this day in particular.

This morning's worship is to be led by one of us who will exit the Cabinet in June, after 6 years. His exterior presentation to many seems stern, austere, even forbidding. But after 6 years, we know better. After 6 years we know that his interior, the one it is hard for him to show, is tender, and sensitive, marked by painful memories.

He reads to us the story in the 13th chapter of John's gospel, where Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and admonished them to follow his example:

> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.
> John 13:14-15

We are as startled as the Upper Room disciples when he takes a towel and basin, and falls to his knees in front of the superintendent seated to his left. Removing one of his colleague's shoes and socks, he places the bared foot into the basin, splashes it with water, and towels it off. Around the circle he moves, in silence, on his knees, to each of us in turn.

At first he is as tentative and awkward as we are, but as he makes his way around the circle he becomes absorbed in his task, and another quality takes over. I do not know how to describe it except as passion. Not only does he wash each one's foot, but he embraces us. He, and we, are moved beyond speaking. Passion, during the week of the Lord's Passion.

The last foot to be washed is that of our Bishop. Spontaneously, without rehearsal or consultation, the Bishop removes the towel and basin from the hand of our comrade, seats him in the circle, and kneels before him - to remove a shoe and sock, and wash his foot.

THE DIFFICULT TASK OF BEARING THE EASY YOKE

The life of Christian discipleship is like none other. It is saying "Yes!" to Life itself, and to the Source of that Life, what Paul Tillich calls "the Ground of our Being." [1] It is to experience reconciliation with and acceptance from God, the Totally Transcendent. It is to encounter relationship and human possibility in Jesus Christ, who for our sake became utterly immanent - God with us. It is to enjoy the continued intimate presence and companionship of the Holy Spirit - comfort, guide and sustainer.

It is also an extremely demanding assignment, as all Christians are aware. There are times, known to each of us, when the difficulty of the scriptural admonition to "...always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Ephesians 5:20) seems particularly severe. As those called to the ministry of superintending, the temptation to give in to despair, the constant specters of fatigue and conflict, discouragements of every sort, all remind us that the drains on us are at least as demanding spiritually as they are physically. Indeed, the spiritual and the physical cannot really be separated.

Who among us who has ever served as a district superintendent is not acquainted with the enervation that results from too many

demands on us in too short a time, or from the impossibly high expectations we often have of ourselves and others, and that they have of us? Who has not been paralyzed by the awareness of the vastness of what needs to be done, and the limitedness of our resources, both personal and corporate, in the face of that need? Perhaps most disabling of all is the knowledge of our own continuing sin and failure - even we who are redeemed, who have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and are entrusted with his work!

The Apostle Paul knew all about it. In Romans 7 he utters a cry that could have come from the suffering of any of us:

> ...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it...So I find there to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
>
> Romans 7:18, 21-24

In the very next verse, Paul immediately answers his own rhetorical question: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" Paul's conclusion concerning where rescue is available for him is the same for us: only through Christ Jesus.

OUR SOLE ENERGY SOURCE

On one occasion I heard Bishop William Boyd Grove, who presides

over the West Virginia Annual Conference, say that increasingly as he is working with groups where there is conflict and controversy, he begins by using with the assembly the ancient words of the Eastern Church: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Bishop Grove says he uses this phrase in difficult circumstances to remind himself and others that our energy for ministry and discipleship comes only from the resurrection of Christ, and the meaning that has for us as disciples.

THE ONLY THING WE HAVE IN COMMON

The good news of the Resurrection is that it is not only the source of our energy, but also the single origin of our oneness. We are reminded of this reality when we gather at the Lord's Table and petition that we may be made"...one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world." It is solely through Christ that we have unity, not because of our homogeneity, or any effort on our part.

The following passage from Ephesians points out that our unity is not something that naturally springs from within us, but is the result of being called, and is a gracious gift.

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all, and in all.
>
> Ephesians 4:4-6

BUILDING THE BODY OF CHRIST

A selection from the Gospel of John reminds us that the gift of our community life, indispensable as it is to us, is not only for our own sake, but is to be a witness to the world. Its function is to demonstrate what the human family can be, and to invite all of creation into relationship and reconciliation. We are given the privilege of our corporate life together not only for our own edification, but in order to be servants to the rest of the created order, which God loves. We model love of God through love of each other, so that others may also know that they are loved.

> The glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.
>
> John 17:22-23

Our corporate life, then, wherever it is found and understood as Christian community, is a sign of the Resurrection, and therefore a manifestation of our source of energy for ministry and discipleship.

One of the primary expressions of Christian community for district

superintendents is found in the corporate life of the Cabinet. It is a place where we discover again our essential unity, and remember the Source of that oneness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer identifies it in this way:

> For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. "He is our peace." Through him alone do we have access to one another, and fellowship with one another.[2]

Within the boundaries of the Cabinet's covenant life we find fresh evidence of God's presence. We are utterly dependant upon the reality of that Presence to live and do our work. Without it, we are without hope. Bonhoeffer observes this reality in his classic description of Christian community, Life Together: "(We) see in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God." [3]

Along with other faith communities to which we may belong, the Cabinet is an expression of the Church as Living Body of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul describes it thusly:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body: Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, All were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.
>
> I Corinthians 12:12-14

Even as the members of a single body have different functions, a

variety of appearances and characteristics, and various responses, so it is with the Body called Cabinet. The Book of Discipline organizes our functions under five general headings: General Oversight of Total Ministry (para. 519), Supervision and Personnel (para. 520 and 521), Pastoral (para. 522), Administration (para. 523), and Program (para. 524).

We have a common, primary task to do together - to assist the Bishop in appointment-making and providing for the general order of the Annual Conference. In addition, we have individual responsibilities as we function as representatives of the Episcopal office in our own districts, where we supply supervision and pastoral oversight for congregational life.

The individual tasks grow out of the corporate task, for we are first called to be members of the Cabinet, and then assigned to a District. We are not first of all appointed to be superintendent of a specific district with membership on the Cabinet being a consequence of that assignment. The Bishop initially invites one to be a part of the Cabinet, and than the district which the new Cabinet member will serve is determined.

This sequence of events is also true for bishops, who are elected to the episcopacy by their jurisdictions, and then assigned to an episcopal area. It has a corollary in pastors who are first received into an annual conference and then sent to serve a

specific church. There is a parallel in the laity, who are baptized into the Christian faith, and then received into a particular congregation. It is out of this calling into corporate life that we gather energy for our individual tasks, for those tasks are simply a division of the labor of the corporate body.

We begin our collective life together as equals - not in abilities, not in experience, but as equals in that we have each been called. We bring our abilities and experience, as well as the uniqueness of our own personality, as gifts to the corporate life of the group. Each adds coloration and texture, without which the dynamics of the group would not be the same. Indeed, observe the subtle but definite change which occurs around the Cabinet table when for some reason one of us is absent. It is not the same group.

THE BLESSINGS OF SIN

Some individual, personal characteristics may seem to be negatives that hinder the life of the community, for we bring our sinful and unfinished selves as well as our gifts and graces. Bonhoeffer points out to us that even these are really blessings in disguise.

> Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother still a brother, with whom I, too stand under the Word of Christ? Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deed,

> but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together - the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.[4]

Thus, all are received; I therefore am accepted also. God's grace covers my sister and brother; therefore God's grace covers me as well. Life in community illustrates and confirms it.

For those of us who are members of the Cabinet, that small faith community can provide opportunity for worship and study, accountability and discipline, confession and forgiveness. Support and acceptance are offered there.

The Cabinet makes available an arena to check working techniques and refine perceptions. Issues of control and power are examined there, because in order for the Cabinet to be most effective, it must operate as a community and its work must be a corporate effort. Cabinet life is a place to find confirmation and correction for one's work and decisions.

A FORETASTE OF GOD'S REALM

How can we do our ministry as District Superintendents, with all the accompanying joys and sorrows, without being part of such a community? Surely the experience will be much impoverished apart from a significant, intentionally-developed corporate life.

> So between the death of Christ and the Last Day, it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians.[5]

Our corporate life as the Cabinet can sustain and expand us, and equip us for our difficult, rewarding work. This experience of community provides us with energy and enthusiasm; energy drawn from the cabinet impacts how much a superintendent can bring to the district. Perhaps we are a colony of heaven, with the potential to illuminate what the Church is to be: a foreshadowing of the time when the Realm of God will be actualized in final form.

1. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,Harper & Row, 1967), 110.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans.J. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1954), 39.

3. Ibid., 20.

4.Ibid., 28.

5. Ibid., 18.

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY
Hearts and Flowers

Our Cabinet takes turns meeting in each others' districts. We do it for a lot of good reasons: it gives us opportunities to extend hospitality to one another; we learn on-site about districts other than our own; it de-centralizes the place where the Cabinet meets; it equalizes travel time.

But when the Cabinet visits one's own district, it is rather like having one's extended family come for Thanksgiving: you are very excited and can scarcely wait until they arrive; you plan with anticipation long in advance; it is also a bit stressful and a whole lot of extra work!

One time the Cabinet came to my Wheeling District in mid-February to begin our lengthy appointment season with a four-day meeting. Late the evening before,and early the next morning before each day's assembling, I scurried around, Martha-like, to see to the house-keeping items we would need completed before the meetings began. And I truly began to feel a little like Martha - focused more on maintenance than the content of what we were doing, or the people who were doing it.

The third day of our meeting was February 14. I made an early morning visit to the room where we gathered, and rushed back out to do an errand. Dashing back just a few moments before the

appointed meeting time, I found my cabinet brothers already seated around the table. "Oh no," I thought to myself, "I'm late again."

When I entered the room I had a moment of alarm as conversation halted, and the entire group stood up. Then, placing hands over hearts with vaudevillian exaggeration, they sang the most amazing rendition of "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." A bouquet of Valentine flowers with my name on it arrived, an extension of the song. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry - so I did both.

Quite suddenly and unexpectedly, I had become Mary again instead of Martha: cherished, appreciated, affirmed.

Community is not only about the serious stuff. Or maybe it's more accurate to say that the serious stuff is also found in laughter and playfulness.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CABINET
An Introduction

The following section of this paper is a distillation of discussions within the Cabinet of the West Virginia Annual Conference on the subject of our community experience. Some of the information has come from informal observations we have made together in the context of our work. Most of the material, however, has been gleaned from three evenings the group agreed to spend specifically reflecting on the topic of our corporate life.

THE FIRST EVENING: SPRING HEIGHTS

Our first meeting took place in the autumn of 1990, at the close of a day of regular cabinet agenda. We met together on the evening of September 10 on the campus of Spring Heights, our Conference Camp and Educational Center. We sat in an irregular circle in large, overstuffed easy chairs and rockers in one of the retreat cottages.

Although I had asked for a more modest commitment of time, we ended up spending the entire evening in discussion and significant personal sharing, as it became apparent that we had tapped into an emotional and spiritual vein that was very important to each of us.

In my estimation, it was a high moment for us for several reasons. First of all, we named and articulated that toward which we have been moving in our experience for some time. Second, it helped confirm that a part of our identity is in the group - no small feat

for twentieth century Americans whose culture has made an idol of our individualism.

Third, we had opportunity to take an analytical look at ourselves as a community; and lastly, we discovered in perhaps a new way that others had strong and tender feelings about being part of the Cabinet.

We felt exhilarated and energized by the experience. Each had a sense not only of being received and accepted, but of accepting and receiving one another. Collectively we revelled in the possibilities for continued growth and community together.

THE SECOND EVENING: DUNBAR

The second evening occurred six months later, on March 5, 1991. The setting was in the meeting room of the motel where we were staying, and took place around the same table where we had conducted our cabinet business during the day. Several of us observed that we wished we had the overstuffed chairs from our first meeting instead of the less-friendly, straight-backed seats provided by the Travelodge.

The experience was a bit different in another way as well. Two who would be appointed to the superintendency at Annual Conference in June had joined us, to observe and learn, and begin to become a part of the group. This occasion marked the end of the first day of

their first meeting.

Again, the witness to what it means to be a part of the Cabinet, personally, spiritually, professionally, was genuinely powerful. The two newcomers were reassured and possibly a trace mystified by our intensity, but certainly received a glimpse of who we perceive ourselves to be, and what the shared values of the group include.

Our Bishop commented on the appropriateness of deliberately planning such a discussion during the first meeting attended by every new district superintendent.

THE THIRD EVENING: NORTH BEND STATE PARK

The last of the three meetings happened two weeks later. Our backdrop this time was a West Virginia state park, where we were in the midst of a four-day meeting in the appointment season. We assembled around a huge open fireplace, which warded off the evening chill of the early spring.

The uniqueness of this gathering was that several spouses (all wives in this instance) joined us. They had accompanied their husbands to this rural mountain setting primarily to enjoy the state park and spend time with each other while the Cabinet was in session, but accepted our invitation to be a part of the discussion on the theme of our life together.

SHAPING THE EVENINGS' EXPERIENCES

My original intention in planning how to structure the three evenings with the Cabinet was to present some aspect of community life centered in specific queries. The first evening we were to consider two questions:

> What does it feel like to be a part of this Cabinet?
>
> What does it mean to me personally and professionally?

The second evening's discussion was to develop out of the first:

> What has contributed in the past to the building of our community?
>
> What is presently occurring which builds community?

The third evening we were to consider two final questions:

> What could we do to further strengthen our group life?
>
> What are the values, individually and corporately, of enhancing our community life?

After the first meeting, I discovered that I needed to tape-record the sessions. Taking notes was insufficient, and the use of the tape recorder freed me to be a more active participant in the dynamics of the group.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY

A comparison of hand-written notes from the first evening, and the taped record of the second meeting revealed an interesting and unexpected feature: the lengthy material was nearly identical in many ways.

I drew three conclusions. First, so much time had passed between the first and second meetings that we had largely forgotten the content of what we had talked about together, although the emotional tone remained fixed in our minds. Second, the authenticity of the content was confirmed by the nearly interchangeable quality of what we had said. Third, the Cabinet evidenced considerable emotional investment in the subject matter, and refused to be boxed in by my more structured, academic questions. In other words, it was just too important a topic to be confined to anyone's set agenda.

MID-COURSE ALTERATIONS FOR THE FINAL EVENING

Nevertheless, I felt this called for a mid-course alteration in plans for the final evening. I decided to retain the fifth question: "What could we do to further strength our group life?" Instead of trying to shape the evening's discussion, I would offer the question as a conversation starter, but allow the group to go with it where they would.

Instead of the original last question, I concluded it would be more fruitful to ask the Cabinet and spouses to reflect with me on "images of community." These would be specific memories of times when we experienced the group as genuine community. I hoped this would give spouses an opportunity to comfortably participate, since everyone has memories. It also would help me to see what events have had special meaning for members of the group. Some of these images of community are incorporated through this paper as short narratives which give brief glimpses into our life together.

Some observations on the third and final evening: while there was continued positive affirmation for the life of the community, such as we had done two weeks before at the meeting in the motel, more energy was put into thinking about ways we could do an even better job of developing community life, and this entailed identifying the ways we have not yet achieve perfection. This is as important work as affirming who we are, but not necessarily as much fun.

It was difficult for the spouses to find ways to participate in the discussion, probably because identifying areas for improvement is less in their experience with the Cabinet. They tend to be part of the life of the group, not in the working aspect of the group life, but in the recreational and festival times. It would most likely have been easier for the wives to be part of affirmations of the community. The exceptions to this were the wife of the Bishop, who knows us well and has spent much time with us, and the spouse of a

six-year superintendent, who leaves the Cabinet in June. She too has had a much longer history with us.

The final evening concluded with a time for the two District Superintendents who were exiting soon to share reflections, feelings, fears, and expectations with us all. This is a part of our normal, structured procedure for colleagues who are shortly to leave us although it was considerably foreshortened on this occasion, probably due to the length and intensity of our prior discussion. (For more information regarding exiting procedures, see page 132 in the Appendixes.)

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CABINET
What it Feels Like From Where I Sit

> Because I experience acceptance here I'm able to do that in the District. I think affirmation hones the best within us. And it's an experience that keeps growing because we are called forth to contribute that and to give this best side of ourselves... That's one reason why I think we should nurture community.
>
> Cabinet Member, Conversations with the Cabinet, March 19, 1991

AN EXPERIENCE OF ACCEPTANCE AND SUPPORT

Among the most important reasons in the minds of Cabinet members in West Virginia for building that group's community life has to do with acceptance and support. This is most critically manifest for us on a personal level, but it is impossible for us to separate it from how we function as those called into the ministry of superintending.

> A large part of what has kept me going for six years has been the support of the Bishop, [his wife] and [my wife], and you all. I can't replace that...This team is special.[1]

Several of the Cabinet members referred to times of personal or family crisis when the support of colleagues illustrated covenant at its best. We have helped bury each others' parents, and even a grandchild. We have celebrated the weddings of our children and family births. Illnesses, our own or that of loved ones, has

brought the support of prayer as well as more tangible signs of concern.

> The support that comes in times of individual need is tremendous...The support of individuals has helped a lot.[2]

> There is no more cherished memory than when you walk into a funeral home in time of deep grief and see the front row filled with colleagues. Some of us have had that privilegeno this Cabinet. The fact that everyone was real busy... When people came up after my surgery, even though I had told you all not to come. Those moments when you really do need one another, but you say you don't, and still people show up, are extremely important parts of our memories.[3]

Sometimes there are family situations that require our attention immediately, and the Cabinet community gives not only support, but permission to attend to them. Both are perceived as reassuring, and seen as loving acts.

> Cabinet Member:
>
> I think there are times when I sense that my experience of community is facilitated by us <u>not</u> being together. When I had family problems that required my attention, I wasn't into much community! A couple of brothers and a bishop who were pastoral to me said,"Get out of here," and I got out.
>
> Sometimes we can be burdened by lots of individual stuff. Giving us time to go at unfinished stuff at home can be the greatest sign of community. With my two kids, it's one crisis after another...
>
> I felt more community being away, and a couple who gave me a buzz in a day or so later... We can do things apart from each other that also enable community.

Bishop (in response):

It sounds like you are saying,"My place there is safe even if I'm not there. If there's a time I need to go, and I'm encouraged to go, that says to me I'm really part of it."

Another Cabinet member (commenting):

I've seen this in the Cabinet off and on through the years. You feel supported when you need to be some place else.[4]

EMPOWERMENT FOR MINISTRY

Another significant area for support identified by the group had to do with our work as superintendents. The sustenance of the Cabinet is also experienced in our ministry: a community with which to celebrate when things go well, and a group that will commiserate with and encourage us when times are more difficult. Several noted a sense of the Cabinet's spiritual presence even when we are separated physically.

I went into a difficult situation last week where both the pastor and the PPRC were ready to throw in the towel... It felt good to know that I didn't go alone...None of you were there physically, but I'll guarantee that you were all there. When I go out into rough situations, I know, I know in my soul I take the whole Cabinet with me.[5]

Empowerment [of the corporate life of the community] has ramifications for when we are not in session...When presenting a pastor to [a certain large] church, I knew I was there representing the episcopal power in the West Virginia Annual Conference, and a pastor chosen through the Spirit by the Cabinet's discernment. There was power in that![6]

NOT FOR OURSELVES ALONE

Among Cabinet members there was considerable acknowledgement that the gift of community has not been given to us solely for our own enjoyment and edification. Members readily conceded that our covenant exists for the sake of the larger community: to empower us for our work in that community, to serve as a model for the expanded community's life, and to be a spiritual resource for that enlarged community. The Cabinet recognized that we have been gifted with our corporate life, not for greater exclusiveness, but for increased inclusiveness.

Bishop (to the group):

In what ways has the life of the Annual Conference been improved by our community life? Because if it hasn't, it's a neat little thing we have going, but it goes no further...

Cabinet member:

I think the feeling of covenant has increased. [Pastor] is a good example. He was just amazed at the number of preachers at his dad's funeral. He felt really supported. It hasn't always been so.

Cabinet member:

My district is impacted because when I come out of this setting, I bring expectations with me. I expect to support and be supported. I expect to be in covenant, and for there to be warmth and celebration. Because I expect that, I do things that will enable it to happen. Not 100%, of course - it's never 100% for any of us - but is does help to shape life within the district, which impacts the whole of us.

Cabinet member (in response):

You impact me. When I went to one of my country churches recently to dedicate a building, I took a picture with me

for them to hang on the wall, as a gift. I thought, "Now, this is something [name] would do!"

Our discussion led us to the conclusion that an experience of genuine community among Cabinet members does indeed affect the districts we serve. Not only do we encounter opportunities for our own personal and spiritual growth, but we bring the benefits of our being part of such a group to our more local settings. What we learn can be applied. We even discover that others appreciate and affirm our covenant relationship as they recognize that it affects them too.

Cabinet member:

At a recent meeting of my Committee on Superintendency, our Bishop said something I hadn't thought of before. He said, "No one ever gets better alone. We grow in a community that trusts us, and entrusts us with duties and responsibilities."

It's true - a community that trusts and entrusts us, with affirmation and coaxing, and pushing, and hoping, and praying and supporting. No one ever gets better alone, but it can happen here.

Cabinet member (responding):

Because we can do that here and be accepted, I'm more open to that happening in district meetings where there may also be a little pushing and shoving, and more give and take. Sometimes a little negative along with the positive. So we are more accepting because we find it here.

Another Cabinet member:

I think, too, sharing with the District pastors and churches about the covenant relationship, not just for the purpose of caring for each other, but out of our common concern for people and pastors. People really appreciate the worship and prayer we do, knowing it is for them.

A CONTINUING FRUSTRATION

While we recognize that there is a great deal of experiential overlap from the Cabinet to the district, there exists some frustration that a clearer vision of community cannot be superimposed on the more local setting. We would like to share the enriching sense of unity which we experience more completely with our districts.

When we are not able to do it to our satisfaction, or when some in the district may not be as responsive as we would like, it is disappointing. Nevertheless, we realize (at least some of the time) that it is not entirely within our control, and that the Gospel itself is invitational.

First Cabinet member:

How do we channel this outward? How do we do it? How can we get the district to replicate it?

Bishop (in response):

Well, your relationship to churches and pastors is a reflection...

Second Cabinet member:

What makes us unique and a community is our worship - this can be shared.

Third Cabinet member:

There is some carry-over...We model - not with the same intensity - the importance of worship in [the] district... This can't be done exactly in the district, but the way we strengthen and respect them is reflected in the way the pastors respond to that.[e]

First Cabinet member:

Well, I can't bring this same kind of covenant to the district. The wholeness and community of the group comes out of everyone being where they are supposed to be...

Bishop:

The community can't be replicated exactly in the district, because they don't come together overnight to do their work, and so forth, as we do, but signs of a heightened sense of covenant are present in each of the districts. Is there not a higher level of awareness of covenant in the Annual Conference because of our experience?

Fourth Cabinet member:

I am convinced that's true. I guess one thing I've decided is that some on the district are going to be more able than others to embrace a community experience. Like Carl Michelson said, "The Gospel's a hint: some get it; some don't." Well, community is like that. Some will get it and some won't.

Fifth Cabinet member:

Another thing that adds to our community [that is different in the districts] is that we all make the same salary and sit around the table as equals. Some of the things that adversely affect community are not realities here - such as salary competition.

Bishop:

We can express frustration and failure, confession, and receive understanding and hope. We urge each other to "hang on," and nobody uses the moment to get one up on somebody else...

We all want community. Each of us wants it not only for our own district, but for all the districts. We want it for each other, for ourselves, and for our Annual Conference. We can offer, but not wholesale import it. The Gospel itself is invitation.[9]

THE GOOD SHEPHERD'S UNDERSHEPHERD

The Cabinet affirmed its debt in building the Body of Christ to our Bishop, William Boyd Grove. There was distinct acknowledgement that we were fortunate to have an episcopal leader who is committed to community building, has skills and sensitivity in this area, and comes out of a pastoral background. We wondered if the building of a sufficient communal life together is possible without a sympathetic bishop. This is of special concern to us, since Bishop Grove's twelve-year term will expire in 1992.

Bishop (in response to the Cabinet):

Active or passive resistance will be hard to overcome, but if you get a new bishop, that person will be a human being. A lot of what happens here I learned from being here. I brought a certain innate openness, but certain things God gave me quickly...I didn't plan to do some things. I was inspired by the moment.

Every person here has brought some of what we have. You can train a new bishop. Take him or her aside and say what Cabinet life means to you.[10]

A WORD OF HOPE

Cabinet Member:

What word of hope is there for Annual Conferences, or colleagues, who may not have a community-building bishop? Or for that matter, churches who may not have a pastor who can help them in this area?

Cabinet Member (responding):

What word of hope? The word of hope is this: God has always had ways of calling us into community - he's the essence of the faith community. It's God's will that we be in community.

If you don't know it now - it's just a matter of time. It's not that it won't happen. With the increasing depersonalization of culture, God will get God's way!"

WONDERINGS: IS THERE ROOM AT THE TABLE FOR ME?

The second and third conversations with the Cabinet included new district superintendents who will be appointed at Annual Conference. Not yet officially part of the Cabinet, but nevertheless already set apart somehow, they were understandably quiet as we animatedly discussed experiences and memories of which they had not been a part.

Bishop (to the newcomers):

Does [all this conversation] make you feel inside or outside?

First new superintendent:

To hear you talk about it helps me to understand...

Second new superintendent:

It makes me feel excited about being a part of it all.

Bishop:

We didn't plan it so, but this is not a bad introductory event...[12]

Some of the Cabinet members had memories and reflections about being a newcomer, and thoughts about the early part of their superintendency. Those with the most vivid recollections, as might be expected, were those in their first and second years.

First Cabinet member:

How can we really adequately define "covenant?" I understand it more, and it has richer meaning for me the longer I am on the Cabinet.

Second Cabinet member:

When I first came, I wondered if I could ever be a part. But the group had already made me a part. It is a sign of the quality of the group that there is room for comings and goings. It enhances Christian community.[13]

Third Cabinet member:

We give attention to those who are joining us and leaving us, not just to help them, but to help us all. There is an evolution to the life of the community. There are things we do now that we didn't do two years ago. Everyone contributes to this...

Bishop:

Cabinets should model in the Annual Conference what life can be like. A parallel is in the Roman Catholic religious communities which not only have a similar pattern of work and worship, but are also inclusive. And part of inclusiveness is openness to the stranger. That's a part of why new people are promptly received.

Experienced Cabinet member:

And maybe why district superintendents feel so cut off so suddenly when they leave. The family who loves most will hurt deepest. [14]

Those Cabinet members with the most recent experiences of being newcomers had clear memories of anxieties about whether the group would really make a place for them. They also could identify specific ways that the circle had begun to integrate them into the community, even before the neophytes joined us physically.

Cabinet member:

New people fear they will not be able to fit in because the closeness of the Cabinet is well-known. However, others extended openness to my coming even before I was willing to be accepted.

Another Cabinet member:

I began to feel a part of the group through prayer and other means even before arriving...Paul's teaching of the unity of diversity - there is a living out of that scripture in the group. It's a mystery! It's overwhelming! But I'm not scared of that. I feel the support...[15]

It seems to take a while for us to gain confidence in the importance of the contribution each of us can make to our corporate life. Perhaps we never entirely get over a sense of astonishment and awe that God has chosen us, not only for pastoral ministry, but also for the tasks of superintending. Apparently even bishops are subject to such feelings. It may well be that the precious gift of our life together also remains an area of reverence and appreciation.

Cabinet member:

Sometimes I wonder why I'm here - why was I chosen? I feel accepted, and I think I'll be very accepting, but I don't trust my contribution yet. I'll do what I can, and let the Lord take care of it.

Bishop(in response):

Well, [name], I know how you feel. When we have the Memorial Service for Bishops, and the names of these great saints of the church are called, I always think,"How in the world did I get here?"[16]

Cabinet member:

At the outset, I asked myself, "Can I become a part of this group? Can I add to it?" But experience is proving yes. Our willingness to talk about it, affirm it, celebrate it is another reason we have it. It becomes part of the shared values of the group as we lift it up.

Experienced Cabinet member:

We do this in families. The family values are the ones we lift up and talk about as a family.

An other experienced Cabinet member:

That's right. We are getting out the family album when we talk together about covenant and community within the Cabinet.[17]

Bishop:

People who come into the Cabinet are "socialized" by the other members, the same as the new kid on the block is socialized by the kids who already live there.

Experienced Cabinet member:

With the turnover of personnel, today's Cabinet is not the same one we had a year ago, or two years ago...The socialization process that makes us into a community instead of competitive persons happens rather abruptly...

Cabinet member:

Correspondence I received from other Cabinet members before I began attending meetings talked about "family," about "joining the family." This was quite a lot different from the experience of some of the other new superintendents I was trained with at Lake Junaluska.

The place for me was already here before I came. It was a little bit like a pregnancy - the new baby is wanted, longed for, expected...

Bishop:

By the time you have come on [the Cabinet], we've all got a lot invested emotionally in you. You've been chosen through a process that included lots of work and prayer. By the time you arrive, we are ready for you![18]

DIVERSITY AS AN ASSET

In our conversations together, the Cabinet explicitly recognized the benefits of diversity around the table. This may have special significance in view of a somewhat widespread cultural view that maximum effectiveness and efficiency comes out of homogeneity.

We not only tolerate diversity, we celebrate it. It seems to us to be one of the wellsprings of creativity and strength for our life together.

Bishop:

The development of the Cabinet has also been the result of the unique gifts of people who have come on.

Cabinet member(responding):

Yes. There is freedom and expectation that one will take part in the shaping of the group. Socialization is not conformity; it is shared values.

My perception has always been that there are lots of similarities between persons on cabinets in some other annual conferences, and maybe historically in our own.

Here we have much diversity and different styles. I think this makes it easier for new, diverse persons to enter in with us. I think it makes us more open to diversity. I think it's been a commitment of our Bishop to have interesting, diverse persons who will interact with each other.[19]

Bishop:

My memories of cabinets [before I became Bishop] is of great conformity. I have deliberately chosen diversity. I ask,"What new thing can this person bring. What will be there with them that wouldn't be there otherwise?"

Cabinet member:

Does this make for efficiency? Are we efficient?

Bishop (responding):

I don t think we are inefficient - creativity comes out of our diversity.

Cabinet member:

Strict, line-by-line efficiency comes out of homogeneity...

Another Cabinet member:

The literature on church growth says homogeneity is a must...

Bishop (still responding):

Are we talking about church growth? Organizations, dynamic businesses and the like don't have clones...

Another Cabinet member (entering conversation):

Well, besides, it's scriptural, isn't it? It's the variety of gifts that builds up the Church, or the Cabinet for that matter.[20]

We learned that sometimes the very things we think may be our most difficult personal qualities can be genuinely helpful to the group. The following excerpt is from a Cabinet member who occasionally is the "prophetic voice" to the rest of us. He sometimes champions what we may tend to overlook in the press of things. Until this particular conversation, it never occurred to me that his confronting us caused him any pain.

Cabinet member:

I guess my tendency to "pop off" bothers me more than it does you all, but I'm assured the community will hear me.

Bishop:

We chose you to do just that. That s one of the reasons you were chosen to be a district superintendent.[21]

One of the advantages of diversity is that it provides a wide range of gifts and abilities from which the entire community can benefit. We do not all have to bring the same talents, but can rest in the assurance that the aptitudes we do bring are essential to the life of the group, and valued by its members. We even discover it is permissible to acknowledge our deficiencies and ask for assistance.

Cabinet member:

I think of all the calls I made in the first year to [a senior superintendent]! How patient he was! You have more questions the first year than the second year...

Bishop (responding):

You have a growing sense of competency. You know you can do the work.

Another Cabinet member:

Yes, but another part is that we begin to learn who on the Cabinet has what gifts, and that it's all right to call on those gifts. I still call on [name] when I have a question about the Discipline.

Sometimes I call to get hard data, sometimes to get reassurance that I've done the right thing. That's a part of the Covenant - learning where the gifts are, and that you can call on them.

Bishop:

I marvel at how the Spirit provides for the gifts that are lost to us with the departure of some people. You think of the people who aren't here now, and we thought,"How are we ever going to get along without [names]?"...

Each who has succeeded has taken what was handed on, and built on that. It's wondrous![22]

CALLING FORTH THE BEST IN EACH OF US

Perhaps one of the most significant characteristics of our mutual experience of Cabinet life is that is seems to frequently draw out the best in us. New depths of patience, affirmation and energy are available to Cabinet members because of our corporate life. We acknowledge that the example of one another inspires us to be better disciples. Because Christ is present and available to us in each other, perhaps Christ is also more present and available to our districts through us.

> A Cabinet member:
>
> When I'm tempted to do things harshly, I think of the Bishop's graciousness, and it shapes me. Remembering the rest of you does too...
>
> Another Cabinet member:
>
> The reason I want to affirm my congregations and pastors is because I'm affirmed here...
>
> Bishop:
>
> You all lift up before my eyes my better self...We do this for each other..."

1. District Superintendent, Conversations with the Cabinet, North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Bishop and Cabinet Members, Conversations With the Cabinet, North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991.

5. Cabinet Member, Conversations With the Cabinet, North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991.

6. Cabinet Member, Conversations With the Cabinet, Dunbar, WV, March 5, 1991.

7. Bishop and Cabinet Members, Conversations With the Cabinet, North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991.

8. Bishop and Cabinet members, Ibid., Dunbar; March 5, 1991.

9. Ibid.. March 19, 1991.

10. Bishop, Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10,1991.

11. Cabinet members, Ibid.

12. Bishop and new Cabinet members, Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

13.Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10, 1990.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

18. Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10, 1990.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

21. Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10,1990.

22. Ibid., North Bend, March 19, 1991.

23. Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10, 1990.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CABINET

Things That Have Contributed to the Building of Our Community

> Dwell in the life and love and power and wisdom of God, in unity one with another and with God; and the peace and wisdom of God fill your hearts, that nothing may rule in you but the life, which stands in the Lord God.
>
> George Fox

MUSCLE AND SINEW

Discussions with the Cabinet continued around the specifics of how we have built community. What are the particular qualities and activities that have enabled us not only to be the Body of Christ, but to strengthen that Body? How have the Body's muscle and sinew been developed in our corporate life?

The Cabinet, with only one dissension[1], pointed to our life in the spirit as the element of greatest importance in building the Body's vitality. The sphere where this is most visibly played out and experienced is in our corporate worship. Over and over we said it in different ways, but the theme was the same: worship is primary. We do it first and last. It is not performed as a perfunctory, pious exercise, but as a genuine expression of who we are.

"Does worship build community," we wondered, " or do we worship because we already have a community life?" Perhaps the best answer is that they mysteriously evolve together, each deepening the

other. We can only bear witness to the certainty that our life in the community makes our worship a very different experience than we have had in many other places.

Cabinet member:

I have worshipped more in the last seven months since I came on the Cabinet than at any other time in my life that I can remember.

Another Cabinet member (in response):

There is such a contrast between worship here and in larger contexts. It is more intimate and personal. We have moments when the Spirit is so real and alive. That openness in worship makes us hungry for it. We want to worship!

And we embrace the one who leads instead of being critical. We come expecting to participate, be a part of it.

Third Cabinet member:

It's true - when ministers go to church they have a hard time laying aside,"Here's how I would do it if I were you." Here I feel you're pulling for me...

Fourth Cabinet member:

Does it empower us when we are thus embraced? I am better in all groups because of the empowerment and support experienced in this one. Now when I preach to preachers, I expect that they will support me like no others.[2]

THE RHYTHM OF WORK AND WORSHIP

The Cabinet attempted to understand why our worship was both primary in our life together, and unique in our experience. We

recognized the rhythmic quality of moving from worship to work and back again, until the two can no longer be easily separated. Worship and work begin to pattern and design each other. Although there is some application to the life of local churches, it is difficult to replicate exactly, because congregations do not as clearly move from worship to work at a shared task.

> Bishop:
>
> [Marjorie] Sujocki and [Fred] Craddock pointed out the rhythm of worship and work at [Northeastern] Jurisdictional Conference. That was one reason the experience was so unique.
>
> Cabinet member:
>
> The tone of the local church is set by the pastor. The style of the Cabinet is set by the bishop. We have a bishop who allows, encourages, permits us to put worship as the priority.
>
> Bishop (responding):
>
> The leadership must be willing to encourage it and give him or herself to it. But it's more than the leadership...
>
> There is an integrity about the way we work that is perhaps created and certainly reinforced by our worship. Cabinets have the reputation that decisions are not made at the table, but by the powerful [ones] outside the meeting...There is no way the Cabinet that truly worships together will violate each other that way.
>
> When we worship, the quality and integrity of our work is better...[3]

(For examples of how worship is structured and experienced within our Cabinet, see pages 133-138 in the Appendixes.)

BUILDING THE BODY

As we scrutinized our life together, we looked for additional clues to help us understand our experience of unity. We were able to isolate several factors that have helped to build the Body.

Our Cabinet meetings are almost always extended over one or two, and occasionally three nights. In other words, we come away from our normal routines to be together, and we live together until it's time to return.

In addition, there is no one place in the Annual Conference where the Cabinet meets. This de-centralized approach allows us to intentionally meet in each other's districts, offering hospitality to one another. A frequent feature is a meal or other activities in the home of the host superintendent.

> Cabinet member:
>
> We are like a religious community. When we are in session, we live together, work together, take our meals together, offer each other hospitality, and pray for each other.[4]

GATHERING AT THE TABLE

Special significance is attached to sharing meals together. We are all more conscious of health and weight concerns than we might have been in the past, and as a result, breakfast and lunch are not quite the events they were five years ago when I first became a part of the Cabinet. People often opt for light breakfasts in their rooms, and several will use the noon break to walk or jog.

Supper, however, is nearly always shared together, and becomes an event: eucharistic, joyful, frequently with spouses joining us. If someone is missing, even for the best of reasons, we are all aware of the break in the circle.

> Cabinet member:
>
> When we eat together, it has a theological basis and focus. It is like communion.[5]

WHO DO YOU TRUST?

The members of the Cabinet were in agreement that the ability to trust one another is absolutely essential for the establishment and continuation of our life together. Without the conviction that we can rely on each other, we may be a collection of individuals with similar jobs, but we will never be a community.

> Cabinet member:
>
> The trust level is very important to community. We come to see and respect each other. It seems strange...since I've never trusted this group [the Cabinet] during my years of ministry [in the pastorate].
>
> The trust level is very high. We can kid each other, and the trust level remains...I think this carries over to the whole Annual Conference...[6]

> Another Cabinet member:
>
> Maybe it was just me, but my experience with the Cabinet in the past has not [been trusting]. I remember a conversation I had with [another district superintendent] last year when I was about to come on [the Cabinet]. I said,"I'll not dump

on you if you don't dump on me." He said, "You won't have that problem with this Cabinet."[7]

DEVELOPING THE FUNNY BONE

The group identified the use of humor as one important means of building the Body. When we are considering heady and potent community-building qualities such as worship and trust, it may be easy to overlook our ability to laugh together, but it remains a significant method of strengthening our bond.

Leonard Sweet, in a recent workshop with the pastors in the Wheeling District, said that Christians who do not reflect the joy of the relationship with Christ are an embarrassment to the Body of Christ. He reminded the preachers that it is unfortunately true that for some disciples,"if there is a bad time to be had, we will have it."[8]

Perhaps all groups would find themselves made stronger if the ability to laugh at and with each other were retained. Our Cabinet affirmed that it is important for us. Much of our common remembered history centers on the funny things that have happened to us together, small quirks in our personalities and mannerisms, and the encouragement we give one another to resist taking life and ourselves too seriously. In other words, the times we have laughed and had fun together help build the corporate life.

Cabinet member:

Humor is important to community. It relieves tension. It's an affirmation of our relationship, and this is very important, for we are a very diverse group. We expect each to perform a unique role and not be like everyone else. So [humor] binds us together. We can be ourselves.

Bishop:

That's why I chose a diverse group - I couldn't stand more than one of any of you!

(laughter from the Cabinet)"

THE STRENGTH OF OUR WEAKNESS

In his book The Wounded Healer, Henri J.M. Nouwen observes that it is only our personal scars that make us fit to be in ministry to each other. Our true strength for the pastoral task comes not from our competency or accomplishments, but from our vulnerability.[10]

In a curious way we find this to also be true for the building of the Cabinet's community life. The aforementioned quality of trust is linked to the ability to allow others to know us in our weakness as well as our strength. To name those weaknesses in the presence of trusted others, and find them receive and accepted, is to become stronger.

Cabinet member:

Strangely enough, the times we seem to remember are the times when we have shown our weaknesses.

Second Cabinet member:

We seem drawn to each other through our weaknesses. Community is built not only on strength, but on vulnerability.

Third Cabinet member:

When we talk about our strengths we are in a sense competing, but when we are talking about our weakness we are not in competition at all...

TWO BY TWO

All the members of our Annual Conference's current Cabinet are married. The spouses who are such an important part of our lives individually are also vital to our community life, for none of us comes to this experience alone. At least at the present time, we come two by two.

These spouses know that they are a part of the Cabinet's community life. Activities are frequently structured to include them. There is probably some variance in what this experience is like for specific wives or husband(s), since some are with us frequently while others are seldom able to come to meetings.

There are, however, three annual occasions when the entire Cabinet and all the spouses are together: our four-day retreat in the autumn, the Christmas dinner and party, and Annual Conference.

The children of Cabinet members, both those grown up and those still at home, as well as grandchildren, enrich our fellowship. We try to make them feel welcomed and loved. They will often join us for meals at Annual Conference. Even when they are not with us physically, we frequently share news of them and lift them up in prayer. Many of them retain an interest in and a sense of connection with the Cabinet.

Cabinet member:

Let's not forget - let's never forget - that there are some folks who live with us who are committed to this Covenant, and even though they are seldom here, they make it possible for it to happen. Folks who have their own vocations, and aren't keen on sometimes being single parents... She helps me be more in tune with this community because she handles things at home.

Bishop:

Our spouses all know that they are part of [community] too. This increases their strength to be supportive.

Another Cabinet member:

The involvement is beyond spouses. Even my grown kids who are not at home have a care and concern for what's going on, because of what they've heard from me, and how much it means to me.

Cabinet member's wife:

I'm glad we've been invited to worship services, since he always comes home and says its the high point for him.

Cabinet member:

I've appreciated (name) being able to be a part not only with the other spouses, but also in times like this with all of us. She gets a lot of support, and a lot of good

out of it - it just flows. It's been very meaningful for both of us.[11]

Another Cabinet member:

The inclusion of spouses is very important. When they hear us talk about it, they know what we are talking about because they are a part of it [too]. [12]

1. The single dissenter reported that, in his opinion, worship would rank second as a Body-building devise. Foremost in his experience are relationships: supportive, caring, challenging. (Conversations with the Cabinet, Dunbar, March 5, 1991.)

2. Conversations with the Cabinet, Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

3. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

4. Ibid.

5. I bid.

6. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

7. Ibid., North Bend, March 19,1991.

8. Leonard I. Sweet, workshop with pastors of the Wheeling District, Wheeling WV, April 16, 1991.

9. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

10. Nouwen, Henri J. M., The Wounded Healer, Image Books, a Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., (Garden City, New York),1971.

11. Ibid., North Bend, March 19, 1991.

12. Ibid., Dunbar, March 5, 1991.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CABINET
What Could We Do to Further Deepen Our Group Life

> By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions...As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant. But I believe in a gradual work both preceding and following that instant.
>
> John Wesley
> A Plain Account of Christian Perfection[1]

MOVING A LITTLE CLOSER TO PERFECTION

Most of the content of the following account comes from the final evening's dialogue between Cabinet members. Consideration of how we might go about improving a community life we already celebrated and affirmed got off to a somewhat slower start. If was almost as though we were reluctant to speak disparagingly of the "family," although the dynamic of having some of the spouses present may have contributed to the cautious beginning.

Occasional, half-hearted quips about arriving at perfection were threaded throughout the evening. However, once we began in earnest, it was apparent that there are indeed areas of frustration that can appropriately be addressed. Dealing with spheres of discomfort, heading off potential conflicts, facing issues where we may feel disappointment; all these contribute positively to the building of

our corporate life. One sign of the resilience of the community is its ability to hear, receive and respond to negative feelings.

> First Cabinet member:
>
> One of the things for me is when we have issues that come up, such as that [recent] paper on baptism, or the one we prepared a while back on ineffective pastors, we don't spend enough time on them generally.
>
> We should set aside time to theologize together - share our thoughts and feelings. Community will be strengthened by more time theologizing...
>
> Second Cabinet member (responding):
>
> I'm afraid this strong, worthy suggestion will fall by the wayside because we overload ourselves. Our agenda is never finished! We say we're going to do things and then don't get around to them, or don't do them well.
>
> Maybe some of what we assume for ourselves could be done by other persons. There are only 24 hours in the day. We some times have to set aside one thing in order to do something else.
>
> Covenant will be strengthened by a mutual, realistic assessment of what we can do, and we can do that better together.
>
> First Cabinet member:
>
> If there are key points or issues, let's have agreement around the table as to how much time will be spent on it. Some things may be more critical to some of us than to others. Some of us may <u>need</u> that particular discussion to be more effective...
>
> We come together to gather support and to share so we can go back and be effective...[2]

THE TYRANNY OF THE AGENDA

It was not long before the continuing frustration over our

inability to ever complete our work surfaced. Although the Dean of our Cabinet, whose responsibility it is to set the agenda for our time together, felt under particular pressure, others shared the sense of uneasiness over uncompleted tasks.

The problem, of course, is not a new one to any phase of pastoral ministry, but we voiced a heightened sense of too many things squeezed into too small a space. Expectations from many quarters, including special interest groups who wish to spend time with us add to a feeling of constantly becoming further and further behind.

Worst of all was our suspicion that we ourselves may be part of the problem by continuing to take on new responsibilities without giving up any of the existing ones. Our intentions are good, but we set ourselves up to continue the pattern.

> Cabinet member:
>
> It's frustrating that we have our time together fractured by many visiting groups, and often don't get around to the really important personnel issues. Perhaps we could designate a day or days for these groups and no others...
>
> Bishop:
>
> We are doing better with that then we used to. They are pretty much out of the appointment season now. We did some years ago try to set a day, but it didn't work because [the various groups'] needs don't always occur on a schedule...
>
> Another Cabinet member:
>
> It feels like we shoulder work that's someone else's

> responsibility...We should turn over more to program staff or the business office...
>
> We get caught up in the moment. If it's assigned to one of us, we know it will be done...We are the culprits of our own undoing, and we need to be cognizant of it...[3]

MAKING ROOM IN THE CIRCLE

Over the past several years the Program Council Director has been considered a part of the Cabinet on all but appointment-making matters. This has greatly increased the sense of cooperation between the Program Staff and the Cabinet. One who exits the Cabinet this year will leave to assume the position of Council Director. We affirmed our commitment not only continue but also to enhance the integration of this post into the life of the Cabinet.

> Bishop:
>
> We have done pretty well in integrating the Council Director into the community, but we can do better. Reality says we can't do it perfectly. But there are a lot of things, like tonight, that don't have to do with appointments that we could include [the Council Director].[4]

NEW WAYS FOR NEWCOMERS

The newest district superintendents in the group lifted up for our consideration some observations out of experiences in their first year on the Cabinet. The need for some kind of on-going training and support was an important issue for them. They offered

specific suggestions for how this might be accomplished.

New Cabinet member:

The new superintendents have training at Junaluska, plus that offered by our own colleagues, which is very important. Maybe for a couple of years it should continue in some form.

Maybe after eight months or so, the new ones could come two or three hours early to the regular meetings, and have continuing training with the veterans - kind of a refresher course...

Bishop:

I affirm that. My experience as a Bishop...I was trained helpfully at the beginning of my term, but in February, after a few months, the veterans set aside an afternoon to deal with whatever was troubling us...

Experienced Cabinet member:

Maybe the training team could do this after the new ones have been on the District for a while.

SHARING TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

It became apparent that not only the newer superintendents would like a "refresher course," but that veteran Cabinet members could profit by the intentional setting aside of some time to share good ideas and techniques. The informal network by which this is usually done may be inadequate. To make available to each other what we find workable in our own settings is a means of enhancing each other's ministry, and building the Body.

This may have some possibilities for application within the districts we serve as well: sharing ideas helps build the covenant.

Bishop:

[Name] asked me to go over administrative techniques - practical kinds of things...We should do this, not only from me but from you to each other, and from you to me...

This would help the building of community too, because it represents support and sharing...

Experienced Cabinet member:

We've done some of that informally. Just look at all the Day Timers around this table.

Another experienced Cabinet member:

Well, the more we know about our work, and the more we know how to be in control of our work, the freer we are to feel ourselves in covenant. If I'm totally upset and frustrated because I've got ten questions I can t get around to getting answered, I m not thinking about covenant - I'm thinking about ME!

Bishop:

In the annual interviews I've had with you, the overwhelming sense I've had from you was that we need to find better ways to share more than we do [regarding] the creativity and processes that have been developed by each one.

The way you do particular things in your own districts that we don't have time to hear about. If we take that time two things happen: a good idea gets implemented in other places, and the originator gets the joy of sharing that and having it affirmed.

Cabinet member:

We should also do this in districts. How often do pastors in the districts share good ideas...

Another Cabinet member:

> Actually, mine have asked for that, but we just haven't gotten around to any good way of doing it.[6]

HEARING EACH OTHER OUT

As painful as it sometimes is, a vital part of authentic community is listening to where another hurts. Sometimes we can do something to improve that colleague's situation; sometimes we are not able to do anything. The apostle Paul's observation regarding the body is one that we find true in our own experience with the Body: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." [7]

Even when we can not"fix it" for another, there remains a degree of healing in simply being heard.

Cabinet member:

> 75% of the time I'm angry and frustrated. I don't feel near as accepted in the work sessions as in other settings. Most of the time I don't feel a part of the dynamics of the group because of the [name] District...[8]

> I don't feel a part of the community when we are making appointments. Every other time I do - but we don't work on the Local Pastors as we do on others...[9]

Second Cabinet member:

> That's one area where we are in competition...

Third Cabinet member:

It may feel like it, but even then the point is not to shaft each other...

Bishop (to first Cabinet member):

What about our new method where all superintendents participate in every decision?

First Cabinet member:

Will it play out to the last appointment? To mine?...

Fourth Cabinet member:

What else do we need to be doing?...We need to think of ways to respond to others like [first Cabinet member) who surface a concern. Not just with words. but with actions.

To be heard is good. To be responded to is even better.

First Cabinet member(responding):

I'm heard. I know I'm heard. And half of the effect is being able to say it and feel you've heard. I get support in that.

Bishop (responding):

Could we do appointments differently in order to pay attention to [first Cabinet member s] agenda? We don't have to start at the top and always go in order...[10]

1. Wesley, John, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, The Epworth Press (London: 1952), 112.

2. Conversations with the Cabinet, North Bend State Park, March 19,1991.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. I Corinthians 12:26, New Revised Standard Version: Holy Bible.

8. Ibid., Spring Heights, September 10, 1990.

9. Ibid., North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991.

10. Ibid.

MAKING SPACE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT:
Spiritual Discernment in Appointment-Making

> But the knowledge of the direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit will not be sufficient. Individual guidance must yield to corporate guidance. There must also come a knowledge of the direct, active, immediate leading of the Spirit <u>together.</u> I do not mean "corporate guidance" in an organizational sense, but in an organic and functional sense.[1]
>
> Richard J. Foster

AN ANCIENT METHOD REDISCOVERED

Spiritual discernment as a method by which Christians make decisions is not a new idea, but a very ancient one. Whenever followers of Jesus have deliberately invited the Holy Spirit to be a part of determinations, and have self-consciously attempted to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, then discernment has taken place.

Often the discernment process has been supported by other spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and fasting. It is undoubtedly yet another way that we must appear foolish to the culture around us, for it illustrates our belief that ultimate truth is to be found in the realm of the spirit. When we have informed ourselves as best we can with logical thinking, scientific and sociological data, psychological profiles and rational discussion, there still remain power and resources beyond our ability to explain or control: in other words, spiritual reality.

The idea of spiritual discernment in appointment-making is not a new idea, either. There are cabinets in our Connection who are already using variations of discernment. In the five years I have been a part of the Cabinet of the West Virginia Annual Conference, we have progressed steadily toward a greater use of this ancient way of making corporate decisions, particularly in appointment-making. This year's movement to a more complete use of spiritual discernment seems a natural outgrowth of the direction in which we have been moving for some time now.

GETTING READY

Our Bishop asked that before and during the appointment season, we agree together to fast and pray while we are apart between Cabinet meetings, in order that we be spiritually ready for our mutual work. Many of us ask for the prayers and support of the pastors and congregations within our districts as well. There is a sense of preparation and anticipation that is almost like training for a sports event. Indeed, like athletes we want to bring our best selves to the task with which we have been entrusted.

Descriptions of both pastors and churches who are on the "move list" are presented in the way that is customary for us, but are followed by periods of centering, silent prayer, imaging, and listening. We then share what has happened to us during these periods: insights gained, images received, assurance given,

or sometimes even silence and confusion.

REMARKABLE DISCOVERIES

Amazing things have occurred. Sometimes we find we are in perfect agreement about an appointment - something which had not been clear before. Occasionally we astonish ourselves with new solutions and possibilities we had not thought of previously. Now and then we are not in harmony. When this occurs, we repeat the process until we reach consensus, unless we decide it is necessary to move ahead.

This method is not perfect, of course, since we who are only earthen vessels are also working with imperfect pastors and congregations, in a yet-to-be-perfected Church. We have found that we must guard against using spiritual discernment as a gimmick, or allowing ourselves to become arrogant and prideful. The Holy Spirit is not at our beck and call, and is often unpredictable. Yet we know in perhaps a fresh way that when work is offered up, and room is made for the Holy Spirit to sit around the table with us, amazing and wonderful things can happen.

Our spirituality, individually and corporately, is strengthened. Our sense of trust and dependance on God and each other is deepened. We see that each of us is given a part of the truth, and we need the experience of the community in order to be in touch

with the whole.

It seems to us that good appointments are made, given the limitations of human imperfection and an incomplete creation. It often feels as if there is a solid grounding for these appointments because of the manner in which they are determined.

INVITING OTHERS INTO THE PROCESS

Our spiritual discernment in the matter of appointments is not just our property alone. The Pastor/Parish Relations Committees with whom we do our initial consultations to identify the needs of the congregation, and to whom we return with the name of the one whom we, in our discernment have selected to be their pastor - they are invited to join us. The pastors to whom we offer opportunities for ministry in new settings - they are urged to listen to the Spirit and see if their discernment agrees with ours.

By reclaiming a part of our Christian heritage through this spiritual discipline, we are not only completing the work of appointment-making that has been assigned to us, we are growing in the Spirit, and hopefully providing occasion for others to experience that as well.

Could this have occurred without a strong sense of community among us? We think not. Our movement toward experiences of spiritual

discernment is an outgrowth of the intentional building of our corporate life, and also helps to strength it.

> A Cabinet member:
>
> If we had not taken time to build community, we would not be right now where we are in relationship to discernment. Because unless we have mutual trust for one another, we could never go into the period of trying to be open to the Spirit and be receptive to it. We would be worried about what someone else was going to say. We'd be trying to protect our own turf.
>
> That's one of the values and benefits - we are able to be more alive spiritually in our work because we have built community.
>
> When I've shared with a couple of PPR committees how we do our work, they are so grateful they have tears in their eyes. You'd be amazed at how many think we put all the names into a hat, draw one, and that's the pastor.[2]

(More information on spiritual discernment in appointment making may be found on page 139 of the Appendixes.)

1. Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline.(San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1978),150.

2. Cabinet Member. Conversations With the Cabinet. North Bend State Park, March 19, 1991.

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY
Travel With Our Blessing

It is late January, 1991. The Cabinet has just completed several days of appointment-making, a process which will continue up to Annual Conference in June. Our Bishop will leave us at the end of this day to journey to Australia. He and his wife will be absent from us for an entire month, attending the Seventh General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra.

A whole range of emotions flicker over us. We are proud of him and his visibility in the Church. We are glad for the opportunity for him to have an extraordinary experience. We rejoice that he will have some precious time away - a kind of "working vacation."

But we are also uneasy. How can we spare him during the critical appointment season? Australia is the other side of the universe, and he will not be readily accessible for emergencies or for the kind of handy consultation to which we have grown accustomed.

And in addition, we know these are dangerous times: the War in the Persian Gulf, with Saddam Hussan calling recently for a holy war against the infidel, has made everyone reconsider the feasibility of international travel. In the secret places of our minds, we individually think the unthinkable.

The afternoon's agenda included a meeting between the Cabinet and

a group from the Annual Conference. We have been meeting in the fellowship hall of a church to accommodate our numbers. Now, as the group prepares to leave, the word spreads rapidly among us: we are to reconvene in a smaller, upstairs parlor.

Almost without explanation we know the reason we have gathered. One of us is quickly assigned to be liturgist. Hymnals are borrowed from the church's sanctuary; a chalice is hastily located, and filled with a bit of mineral water confiscated from the kitchen refrigerator.

The Roman Catholic Church encourages its families to make use of "the Blessing Cup" for little household services - birthdays, celebrations, comings and goings. On this afternoon our own small household of faith borrows this homely ritual. We have gathered to send our Bishop on his journey with our blessing and although she is not physically present, his wife as well, for she is also beloved by us.

A hymn is sung: "Blest be the dear uniting love that will not let us part/Our bodies may far off remove, we still are one in heart." Prayers of blessing and sending forth are then offered by each of us with the response "Lord in your mercy/Hear our prayer."

Next the chalice is passed among us. We drink, and pass the cup to the one next to us, accompanied by a word of individual blessing

for that companion. Perhaps we will say in retrospect that our sharing of the single vessel reminded us of our unity, which comes from Christ alone, and that time and space or even death itself can never finally separate us from one another or from God. But for now it is enough to simply receive, and drink, and be blessed.

The Bishop leaves - there are bags to be packed and planes to catch. The rest of us close the gap in the circle his leaving creates. We linger for a few moments, and seem reluctant to adjourn. It may be that we are comforted by each others' presence. It may be that there are precious few times in this human life that we allow ourselves to drink deeply.

INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUAL SUPERINTENDENTS

Daniel: Only Half the Man He Used to Be

The following is the major part of an interview with District Superintendent Daniel [redacted]. This exchange took place on April 17, 1991 at his parsonage in Parkersburg, West Virginia, at the end of a long and busy day for both of us.

I began the discussion by reviewing my purpose for inviting Daniel to be a part of this project. He has been a member of our Cabinet for nearly two years, and during this time has had some dramatic changes related to his health and physical appearance. I was curious to know how the experience of being on the Cabinet has effected these special circumstances.

P: Can you briefly describe how you experience being on the Cabinet in terms of community?

D: I can honestly say, since I have been in ministry, it is the first true community of colleagues I have ever been in. From time to time I have said I sought community, but I'm not sure I really wanted it. I may have been among those who wonder if community can happen among those who feel in competition with each other.

I think that's one gift of the cabinet - you really are not in competition. You are equal. It gives freedom to be more who you are with one another than I have experienced any time in ministry.

P: Is there anything in your experience as a pastor or a Christian that has been like this?

D: The community I feel and experience is based on appreciation for who I am and the gifts I have. I sense there are eleven others who actually appreciate and expect more of me than I even appreciate and expect of myself...in

other words, particularly the Bishop, I think sees me as more capable than I see myself...that's one of his gifts.

It encourages me to do more, achieve more, and be more self-confident than I think I've ever felt before, even as I feel inadequate to do the job...the magnitude of what we do, trying to keep in touch with all the different components of just one appointment is so awesome to me.

Sometimes I really don't think I could do it without knowing those others are there as my support, and as there is almost a oneness that develops among us...So I feel more supported personally and spiritually.

I feel, spiritually, people are truly praying for me as I pray for them. I have not always felt that other people were doing that for me.

I sense a freedom with colleagues that I have never, ever sensed, and I can understand why exiting is so traumatic, because [community] is difficult to develop....

The Eucharist has taken on a totally different meaning in this group because of the deep sense of community. That makes [it] even more important for us...

P: You mentioned that you felt more spiritually supported. What spiritual insights have you come to, or are you coming to?

D: Hmmm...

P: Is that tough? I think you were beginning to allude to them when you mentioned the Eucharist.

D: Yeah. I think there is for me personally more of a trust in spiritual things. I've learned - and I've known this and tried to practice it, but I've truly learned in the last two years to rely on that Power other than myself.

It's only by that Grace that I can go into some of these churches and feel renewed when I knew going in that I was going to come out feeling anything but that...I think because of the deep sense of...it's so hard to explain what I'm trying to say - I think the depth of feeling we have as we share the burdens of the people in our districts, or our families; the level of prayer we get into as we pray for those persons...

The preaching...I guess I'm saying that even though we may be at different places on our spiritual journey, we are probably closer together, and therefore as we preach, it's almost like a marriage.[Someone] can say something, and we know what he

means...we can almost understand by a word or a look, like in a marriage...To me that's the first time, other than with my my wife, that I have experienced community like that. And it's really fun!

P: It is fun - there's joy in it.

D: It has freed me up to try to communicate more spiritually with others, because I am more confident in my own spirituality.

P: We'll probably be formed and shaped by this for the rest of of our pastoral ministry. It will probably make a difference for us. Tell me some about what's happened to you in terms of your health - you are only half the man you used to be!

D: Ah yes. Well it began...it's been a process. As you know, I was a smoker. When the Bishop asked me to be on the Cabinet, I couldn't wait to get back in the car so I could have a cigarette...On the way home, I thought, "How are you going to deal with this?"...So I determined I was going to quit or light up at the first Cabinet meeting.

And I can honestly say it is much more awesome to light up in front of the Bishop than it is God! So I went to my doctor and got the helps I needed, and quit smoking before my first Cabinet meeting two months later.

That was not easy. It took a lot. I ate a lot. As you know we used to eat a lot more at Cabinet meetings than we do now...

P: Yes. and worse things...

D: And in the first six months of being on the Cabinet, I put on over 40 pounds, and was over 300 pounds for the first time in my life, although I've always been obese.

And during that first round of Charge Conferences, it became more and more difficult for me to get into the car and go, because of my size. It was not an "ah ha!" experience. It just became more and more evident that...no matter what I was saying, or how profound I was, they were only looking at my size. It became a physical and spiritual crisis for me.

So I went to [the doctor] and we agreed that I needed to do something radical. I've done radical things before to take off 20 pounds, and then put 30 back on, but this time it was different...

The most interesting thing happened. Of course I couldn't not let the Cabinet know what I was doing, but I didn't have one

person try to talk me out of it, as friends usually do...Not once did anyone say,"Eat tonight, diet tomorrow." Not once. Isn't that amazing?

P: What does that say to you?

D: It was support! Total support...I really believe you all sensed I was near crisis. I didn't say it in that way, but deep down inside I must have communicated how very important this was to me. And every two or three weeks when I'd come back to Cabinet, someone would notice I'd lost...Each Cabinet meeting became my goal...

I firmly believe that if I hadn't quit smoking I wouldn't have conquered the weight.

P: They were related in some way...

D: Well, the inner strength to quit smoking - when I found out that strength was there - it wasn't my own strength. I have no doubt the dear Lord helped me...and you listening to me, encouraging me, being honest with me, talking about healthy things...I started walking, and then running...

P: It's amazing what you've done with your exercise program...

D:...Without the strong non-verbal and verbal support of the Cabinet I don't know that it would have been done. So we get back to community. I'm probably the most secure person I've ever been in my relationships with other people right now, even though I still sometimes feel insecure in doing the job...

P: How do you think your saga has affected us? What's the pay-off for the rest of us?

D:...There are a lot less fattening things put around the [Cabinet] table than there used to be.

P: So we are offering each other healthier hospitality?

D: I really think so, and I think a lot of that may have to do with people not wanting to tempt me...I think everyone is more conscious of what they are eating.

P: I believe it is an issue for us all...

D: I've had different people occasionally make little comments to me - [Another superintendent] came up and put his hand on my shoulder and said,"I don't know if I've really ever told you, but I just so admire what you've done..." Any witness we

make helps someone else...

P: So we encourage and strengthen each other to do what we have to do. Because health issues are really religious issues, aren't they?

D: Of course. That's how it all started. How can I proclaim the Word of God, and model the Word of God, in the condition I'm in.

P: How long did it take you to lose that weight?

D: I started the 27th of December, and when I went to Annual Conference the eighth of June, I had lost 98 pounds. I had started walking in May...and then when we went to Annual Conference I decided, "Well, I'm going to try to jog a bit..."

I'd jog a block and walk a block...I set a goal of jogging one mile by fall, and by fall I was running about 3 miles a day. Now I'm doing between four and five miles a day, and I do that religiously. I make time for that.

P: And you've lost how much all together?

D: 125 altogether.

P: How long have you maintained it at that level?

D: I guess since September - seven months...I have set some short-term goals to give myself some incentive...my goal now is to go to Annual Conference without having put any weight back on...

P: You really are not on a diet anymore, are you?

D: No.

P: You are eating normally, but you've modified your eating patterns quite a bit.

D: Yes..and I'm very careful. Nothing sweet...

P: What spiritual insights have you gained from this journey?

D: Probably the most important is very simple but true: the strength to do whatever we want to do is there, if we are open to God leading us through.

P: Is there a Biblical passage that you link that to?

D: I was thinking,"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That occurs to me right now...

I have to practice "just for today" a lot. Sometimes "just for this hour"...

P: Anything else you want to say....?

D:...Part of losing weight was the Cabinet calling forth the best in me...

(See page 140 in the Appendixes for an article in The United Methodist Reporter about Daniel Johnson.)

INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUAL SUPERINTENDENTS
Sue: A Place at the Table

Sue [redacted] and I had a conversation on the evening of April 22, 1991, during the supper break of a Cabinet meeting. In her mid-forties, she is part of a clergy couple with two school-age children. Sue is presently serving a small congregation which in recent years experienced a devastating fire. Under Sue's leadership the church has been rebuilt.

At Annual Conference in June of this year, the Bishop intends to appoint her to the Cabinet. This means that at least for the coming year there will be two women district superintendents in West Virginia.

In March, Sue and another who will shortly become a superintendent, were invited to begin attending our meetings as observers. This was cut short for Sue by some unexpected surgery, and she missed about six weeks.

I began the interview by telling her again how pleased I was to have a sister on the Cabinet, and that I wanted to explore with her something of what it was like to be in her current position.

> P: Tell me what it feels like for you right now. You are kind of in between: you are not officially on the Cabinet yet, but your status has certainly changed.

S: I guess the two words I'd use to describe my feelings are "good" and "tentative." I've told several people that I've spent 20 years trying to learn how to be one thing, and still have a lot to learn about that, and now all of a sudden I find I need to learn to do something else. I find a lot of preparation needs to be done...

At the same time I've felt a great sense of family on the part of the Cabinet, reaching out to me, and making me feel a part of them. And, also, in a very mysterious way I feel a deep sense of calling to this.

P: Is it your expectation, then, that the form of ministry you are about to do is substantially different from pastoral ministry in a church?

S: At the heart of the superintendency a person must be pastoral, else whatever order is there, or whatever they seek to help people to do has no meaning...

I never felt one of my strengths to be administration, but when we had the fire [at the church], I began to be grateful that maybe God had given me gifts in administration that I didn't think I had.

P: There is a degree to which whatever you've done in the past is preparation and training for whatever lies ahead?

S: Yes. I think I've learned that the community that was built by God around a common task is a real bond...The lay people who worked most closely with me [during the fire] had always been colleagues in the ministry of the church, but the fact that we felt we were moving in the direction that God wanted us to move - we had a very specific task - created a bonding that made work effective.

P: What carry-over do you anticipate this will have for your work here?

S: Well, as a superintendent you are in a position to provide opportunities for people to experience community. Just being aware of that is maybe the first step...A person has to follow up on that in intentional ways. But I think ministry is enhanced when people feel supported.

P: Maybe ministry is impossible without that support.

S: I believe so.

P: Are there ways your life has changed since you found out you are going to be appointed as a superintendent?

S: I felt a lot of affirmation from people...I think, too, a person's priorities change, or maybe the focus of responsibility. There are a lot of areas that I seem to be seeing from a different side now. I anticipate that there's lots of preparation to be done.

P: What form is your preparation taking right now?

S: Because of the surgery I haven't been as intentional about reading and study, but I know this will come. I want to be as prepared as I can be, since I've had no experience.

P: I think your attendance at Cabinet meetings is good preparation. Otherwise, a lot of it is "on the job" training. You don't need to know all the answers before you become a D.S.

What things are you fearful of? Maybe nothing...

S: Maybe everything! I guess I've always wanted to be a part of the solution for people...I guess one of my fears is that I won't be up to that...it will take time.

P: You might not be able to "fix it" right away, huh?

S: (laughs) Maybe not...

P: Are there wonderments you have about the life of the Cabinet? At dinner tonight you and I talked about certain social customs that are a part of the culture of the group. Are there other things that you wonder about regarding the life together here?

S: Well, I've seen a real sense of community, and I've felt a part of that in so many different ways already. I don't have a fear of not being the part I've been asked to be in terms of relationships within the Cabinet. They're already made it possible for me to not be afraid of that.

P: How have they done that?

S: When the announcement was first made, I think I heard from everyone in some kind of affirmative way. And then when I got sick, people from the Cabinet wanted to know how they could help me stay with you in the process [of appointment-making].

My D.S. has sat down with me twice, and brought me up to where you are. Others have said,"Anything you need - a ride, an answer to a question, or just someone to talk to, just call." That means a lot.

P: What do you make of it when people do that?

S: I've always been a person who values relationships, and I work an awful lot out of feelings - maybe too much - so it's just been very good for me. It's made me feel as though, even though I'm not prepared for this, that maybe yes indeed, with their help, and Christ's help, I can do this work...I don't see this as a place in the Church where one could be effective without some kind of community.

P: And you have evidence already that you'll receive that from the Cabinet?

S: Yes.

P: Is there any part of you that is anxious regarding being really integrated into that life?

S: No. The anxious part comes from maybe being inadequate at doing my part...and also wanting to be as sensitive and supportive of other people as they have been of me.

P: This is probably premature to ask since this is really only your second full meeting with us, but I'd like to know

if there has been any shift in your spiritual life because of what's happened to you in the last several months.

S: I think because I feel unsure about how unable I am, I'm trying to develop more of a "pray without ceasing" mode. I did before anyway to some degree...but I think I'm really more open to prayer in terms of on-going communication. I may not always be smart enough to listen, but I'm talking more!

P: Do you think you'll get any support and help with that in the Cabinet?

S: The meetings themselves, times of devotion and prayer, call me into a deeper devotional life when I'm not with the Cabinet. I think the quality of that experience together tells me that the more I can develop that kind of regular and intentional devotional life privately, the more attuned I'll be to what God wants us to be about.

P:...I wonder if you have had a sense of spiritual support as others have prayed for you...and if the answer is "no" please know that's all right.

S: Oh, I've felt it...Two Sundays ago I preached on "Being Lifted Up Into the Light." The pivotal illustration was the Bishop's visiting me in the hospital and praying with me. That's what he prayed.

The fact that the prayers not only of the Cabinet but also of my own people - I think they were very instrumental in my healing. It opened me up to...that kind of prayer concern makes a person want to get well...It made a big difference for me.

P: So in your experience it was a very real thing...

S: Very real.

P: What's your anticipation of what your role will be in doing that for others?

S:...I think it's all too easy to take it [praying for others]

for granted, and to think there must be something else more important we could be doing, when really there isn't...It's very critical.

P: So the next couple of months you will be further integrating into the Cabinet, and the life of your new district, and bringing closure to your present ministry. How do you keep a balance between them, and still be a wife and mother at the same time?

S: The surgery has really slowed me down - I needed that. I understand better [the importance of] resting, the renewing of relationships, taking more time with individuals rather than running from one task to another. I think it has helped prepare me for this work.

P: Sounds to me as if the surgery itself has had some spiritual insights for you.

S: You can quote my sister on the Cabinet who wrote to me to say that they "were saving my place at the table." That was one of the most profound and helpful bits of support I got.

P: I'm glad...Are there other things you want to say... questions I should have asked that I haven't?

S:...I have learned that being in a very tentative and vulnerable situation does have its advantages. A person at least has the opportunity to look at all that they've been about in a different way.

Maybe even without the surgery it would at least give a person a chance to take a step or two back, and ask themselves what's really important, and how they can best fulfill the calling they have.

INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUAL SUPERINTENDENTS
Lawrence: A View From the Other End

Lawrence [redacted] is one of two senior members in our Cabinet who will be completing a six year term this year. He will be assuming duties as the pastor of a large congregation in the eastern part of the Annual Conference.

At the age of sixty-five, Lawrence is also our senior member chronologically. He intends to continue in full-time pastoral ministry until the Discipline requires him to retire - a mark of his enduring energy and vitality. His time on the Cabinet has been distinguished by his skill and knowledge in church polity, his warm pastoral qualities, and his abilities as a historian. He has brought us all to a fresh appreciation of our heritage, and new sensitivity as to how this intersects with our future.

Lawrence consented to be interviewed during the noon hour at a recent Cabinet meeting.

> P:...I'm interested in your perspectives on what it has been like to be part of this Cabinet for the last six years. What spiritual insights have you come to?
>
> L:...I think spiritual insights come about as a part of the overall sense of shift [in the Cabinet]...I've been giving a lot of thought to that. The Cabinet has changed both in membership and direction. When I think about how it was when I first came on, and how it is now, I think there has been a major shift for the good...
>
> We are in the midst of flux here, as persons come and go, and as we change in our relations with one another...it's a lively, vital thing. And believing that the Holy Spirit is

God Alive Among Us, I think this has been the work of the Spirit...

The thing I always come back to is the whole matter of corporate worship, which comes from and feeds our individual worship. I think there has been a shift in this as well.

No longer is it a perfunctory matter but is a depth of sharing personal insights and experiences. The spiritual growth also has been to celebrate the spiritual growth of others, and to see how we help each other as we worship and work together.

P: The whole Cabinet seems pretty clear that the worship experience is the base on which we build our corporate life.

Has there been any other place in your life as a pastor or a Christian which has paralleled this experience?

L: Not exactly. Of course I've attempted to be involved in small group experiences...however, I've never been as involved as I have with this small group...Of course, part of the exiting process is to realize that this is the part one anticipates missing, although one will also search for it in the local church.

The stability in my life has always been family. My wife and I have five children, and we've always been involved with them in worship and sharing together, so that when we talk about the Cabinet life as family, this has intense emotional involvement for me...

P: How will this affect your ministry? You are going into a local church now. Will there be carry-over? Are there things you will do differently because of this experience?

L: As I view myself, I've always looked upon myself as a pastoral person - the way I'm made is to care for other people. My joy in returning to the local church is for preaching and pastoral care.

I think the depth of pastoral care we have for each other here helps bring that more into focus, and I think will make my pastoring more meaningful. As indeed, was it Harry who talked about how this reflects back into our relationships with churches and pastors? I feel that heavily too...

Where many people look upon this position as one of supposed power or rank, or authority or something, I always looked upon

it as being pastoral and relational. So the skills that have helped in this position will also help as I go back into the pastorate.

P: You mentioned before that there was a level of pastoral care we provide for each other here. How is that going to happen for you when you leave us?

L: I'm having an experience now that I've never had before, and I think [the pastor I'm following] has helped make it happen. Hardly a day goes by that we don't get a card or a note [from congregational members] saying how glad they are we are coming.

Also, it just happens - casting bread upon the water - the local church ministries person is someone who was in my UMYF in another church. We both look forward to renewing that relationship.

P: So you anticipate the relationships within the congregation will do that for you?

L: I'm looking forward to it.

P: Are there things that, as you prepare to go into a different expression of ministry, are there things that you personally feel uneasy about? Anything you are afraid of?

L:...Sure, the whole matter of change of focus, with the regularity of hospital visits, and sermon preparation and all that...But I've maintained a fair amount of preaching and pastoral care in this job...it's just not as big a circuit to ride!

P: One of the things you've done for me personally during these years has been to make me feel I could always tell you exactly how it was with me - how I felt, how tired I was or whatever, and that you understood perfectly. The receiving of that was supportive to me...Is there any way the Cabinet has done that for you as well?

L: Oh yes.

P: Can you talk a little about that?

L: I look forward to coming to Cabinet meeting as a kind of family reunion. Learning about how it is with people...as they used to say in the Wesleyan classes, "How is it with your soul?" As well as family matters...The openness we have with one another...there is acceptance and sharing. All the members of the Cabinet have done this uniquely for me.

P: Are there things you know now regarding the Church that you didn't know before?

L: At least it has come more fully into focus. I am sure that enthusiasm, good news - accentuating that which is worth celebrating, as we do around the table as we also share concerns, this happens in local churches. I've seen it happen where a church under one kind of leadership may be reflecting negativism and all that, but under another kind of leadership can be turned around...

Attitude is so important. This has really come into focus for me as I work with churches and pastors.

P: So the importance of remembering that it is <u>good</u> news we have is pretty primary...

L: Yes.

P: Are there things you know about yourself that you didn't know before coming onto the Cabinet?

L: I think I had a lot of misgivings because I had the usual stereotypes of what a superintendent was, and I knew I wasn't one of those! I had some concern over whether a pastoral, relational mode would work in an administrative position. I had a heavy concern over that...but I'm convinced that a pastoral mode does work. My change has been a lot of self-acceptance at that point.

P: Would you go further than to simply say that a pastoral mode works?

L: I'd say it's the <u>only</u> way! And I think the personnel on

the Cabinet now reflects that, and that's a large part of what causes what we have.

I've reflected on whether it's the persons as they come in, or whether they are molded into it: the whole level of positive attitude, caring and concern, not only for other Cabinet members but for the Church at large.

I think a lot of things happen because of attitude and approach. In the whole matter of appointment-making, for example. It's not what do I want, but what is best. When I first came on the Cabinet there was lots of talk about "fishing in another's pond." I haven't heard that phrase for a long time.

P: What you attribute this shift to?

L: I think one important thing was the Bishop's sounding the note for us all to tune to. We began to taste and see that it was good...

P: So some of the shift came because our leadership made a place where it could happen, and some of it came about because we responded.

L: Yes.

P: Are there spiritual insights you've come to in these last six years? How have you grown spiritually?

L: Well, I have a firmer faith that God does things in spite of us...and I look on even the appointments as a time for religious experience...some [appointments] could not have been made in our own strength...

In charge conferences...if we are open, we can make it a time of spiritual growth...a time to challenge, but also to find positive things, to share the Good News.

...Even as Brother Lawrence practiced the presence of God while washing the dishes...spirituality isn't found in some big event, some great opening of the skies, but in the work around the table, charge conferences, worship together, traveling...

There is tremendous spiritual dimension in common things. I

do a lot of praying while I drive along. Although I try not to shut my eyes for those prayers!

P:...Are there other comments you want to make about being on the Cabinet?

L: It's been - and continues to be - a joy to serve on this Cabinet, especially in more recent times when the uniqueness of the group enveloped our life together.

I wish there was a way this could be shared with others...so that they may themselves taste and see...

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY
Passing the World Around

Morning has broken, and the sunlight streams through the windows and glass doors of the room where we are meeting. We are gathered for worship at the beginning of the day. The one who will lead us has a burden for the world-wide mission of the Church, so when a large, inflatable globe appears, we are not surprised.

"Today," he says, "we will pass this globe around our circle. When it comes to you, place your hand on a spot somewhere in the world where you know someone personally. Tell us about them, and we will all pray together for them."

When the globe is placed in the hands of our Bishop, he relates to us his concern for his brother bishop in what was then East Germany, still behind the Berlin Wall. He calls him by name, and places his finger on Germany. We all pray for Ruediger Minor.

And the world continues around the circle. My hand is placed on West Africa, where my husband and I were teaching missionaries. The group lifts up our secondary school and its principal in prayer.

Another remembers his seminary days as a classmate of Ole Borgen. He touches the Scandinavian region, and we pray for the Church in that part of the world.

The last one to receive the globe is superintendent in the southern part of the Annual Conference. His district not only includes the poorest county in the state, but like much of the rest of West Virginia, is afflicted with desperate economic circumstances. Yet they are always at or near the top in supporting their fair share of the Conference Mission Budget.

Taking the globe in his hands, his voice trembling with emotion, he addresses the rest of us:

"I have never been to another country. I have hardly been outside the borders of West Virginia. But I have been up and down the hollows of MacDowell County, in little rural churches out in the country where people struggle to pay their apportionments. Poor people. Faithful people. And partly because of their loyalty and dedication, there are Christians in all the parts of the world you have mentioned today."

We pray for the faithful in MacDowell County.

OBSERVATIONS FORM THIRD AND FOURTH YEAR DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS' CONSULTATIONS

HOW THE CONSULTATIONS CAME ABOUT

In 1986, the Division of Ordained Ministry, part of our denomination's Board of Higher Education and Ministry, concluded that the dearth of literature about the district superintendency warranted correction. Little information about superintendents and their work existed. Still less formal attention had been paid to how they felt about their function, or how they experienced life as district superintendents. What were the joys and frustrations, the trials and rewards of tending a district in the United Methodist Church in this era? What visioning for the future regarding the ministry of superintending was being done by the supervising elders of our generation?

To have no information in answer to questions like these looked like a gap of enormous proportion, since the critical nature of the superintendency to the mission of the Church seems indisputable:

> The district superintendent shall oversee the total ministry of the pastors and the churches in the communities of the district in its mission of witness and service to the world...[1]

The original intent of the Consultations was primarily to gather

information. It was determined to hold such meetings nationally with third year superintendents in the years 1986, 1987, and 1988, with subsequent consultations being held every other year after that. Since this would by definition exclude the participation of some superintendents whose third year in office occurred on the "off" year for the gatherings, it was decided to expand to include those in both third and fourth years.

The result was a booklet entitled Exercising The Gift: Called to the Ministry of Superintending, which contains information from consultations held in 1986 through 1989. A second booklet, Exercising The Gift II, has been published and distributed. It includes new data from the meetings held in 1990.

Several hundred district superintendents have participated in these consultations over the years, with meetings being held in Denver and Atlanta. A great variety of subjects has been explored with them. For the purposes of this paper, we will examine the district superintendents' observations that have to do with corporate life.

A LONELY TASK

District superintendents, like all human beings, hunger deeply for community. Their yearning is perhaps intensified by the stresses and isolation which sometimes seem to be a part of the position.

Superintendents at the consultations were probably representative of their colleagues everywhere when they expressed frustration over the sense of loneliness they often experienced.

> I miss the community of a congregation.
>
> I have a sense of isolation
> from my peers
> from church families in the district
> because I feel geographically disconnected.[2]
>
> Superintendents miss most the "special" times in a pastor's life: hospital visits, funerals, weddings, confirmation, etc. These used to provide a spiritual wrestling that is now absent.
>
> I do not have a sense of community.[3]

A FREQUENT REFRAIN

On the other hand, the Cabinet was often seen by the superintendents participating in the consultations as a place where community can happen. It is frequently cited as the point where one can find support and friendship. Not only fellowship is available, but also spiritual formation and growth are possible in the context of the Cabinet.

> For many, the cabinet and that group's depth of spiritual sharing and devotion has become a fruitful context for growth in faith. [4]
>
> I do not know what I would do if it were not for the relationships with the cabinet. These provide support and retreat. Is a support group need and a spiritual direction

need sufficiently alike that the same group can fulfill both needs? And, can a cabinet do both of these as well as be a work group?[5]

District superintendents appreciate each other and the support they receive from the cabinet fellowship. This is one of the saving features for these persons who are in one of the most difficult assignments the church gives to any of its leaders.[6]

It was clear in these consultations that the cabinet is the favorite system for superintendents. It is the place where they receive spiritual nurture and support. In many ways it becomes their congregation for work, worship, and affiliation.[7]

WE WANT STILL MORE

Although many district superintendents found a genuine context for fellowship and spiritual growth in their cabinet experience, evidence remained that an even more profound encounter was needed and desired. In a section on visioning, several of the participants expressed wishes for the future centered on the corporate life of the cabinet, not only in terms of friendship, but also highlighting spiritual need.

What if:

Cabinet retreats were visioning events without housekeeping

We could have one full day a month for dealing with the Spirit's agenda without other agendas.

We instituted individual prayer life among the cabinet to reconnect with God and our call.

> We acknowledged that we must have covenantal commitments to one another in community.[8]

In evaluations submitted following the events in Denver and Atlanta, nearly half of the positive comments identified elements of community as the most important and satisfying part of the respondents' participation in these events. Such phrases as "fellowship", "mutual sharing," "support and encouragement," "to hear and be heard," were typical of the affirmative comments.[9] This somewhat unexpected result illustrated that the value of the consultations was found not only in the function of information-gathering, but in providing superintendents an opportunity to be together.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

Several of the recommendations coming out of these experiences are directly concerned with community-building and spiritual formation issues in the Cabinet.

> We recommend:
>
> 1. That a time and place for being with other district superintendents for sharing joys, pains, successes, and the updating of information about district superintending should be continued.
>
> 2. That a periodic spiritual formation experience should be offered for district superintendents.
>
> 3. That a process be developed at the annual conference level

for entry into superintending which would include the normal grief process for leaving a local church.[10]

We recommend:Issues Individual Cabinets Should Address

1. Their own appointment making process.

2. The orientation of new district superintendents...

3. Provide a team building and group discovery process each time a new member enters the cabinet...

4. The individual cabinets must deal with spiritual formation issues...[11]

Some conclusions regarding the potential of the cabinet's community life may be drawn from an examination of these particular results of the Consultations for Third and Fourth Year District Superintendents.

Superintendents need to have a sense that they belong to a community which can support and affirm them. In addition, the corporate life of that group should assist them in their spiritual growth.

The most likely place for such a community to be experienced by district superintendents is the cabinets to which they belong. If the cabinet does not provide such an background, we long for it desperately. If it is present, we celebrate it.

1. The Book of Discipline (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1988),287.

2. J. Richard Yeager, transcript, cassette tapes and newsprint, Third and Fourth Year District Superintendents' Consultations Atlanta and Denver, 1990.

3. Exercising the Gift: Called to the Ministry of Superintending (Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1989), 51.

4. Ibid., 48.

5. Ibid., 52.

6. Ibid., 59.

7. Exercising the Gift, II (Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1991), 11.

8. Ibid., 17.

9. Yeager, Ibid.

10. Exercising the Gift, 54.

11. Ibid., 56.

IMAGES OF COMMUNITY
A Visit From Geraldine

The Cabinet gathers at the home of the Program Council Director, who will be retiring this year. He and his wife are hosting a dinner party for superintendents and spouses, partly as a final gesture of hospitality, and partly to celebrate the birthdays of the Bishop and another Cabinet member. We are glad for any opportunity to be together, but we are especially fond of birthday parties.

After the meal, the warmth of the spring evening allows us to gather outside on the patio. We drink coffee and shower the birthday honorees with appropriate gifts.

Most of the presentations make us laugh: funny coffee mugs; a plaque inscribed with "We've been through a lot, and most of it has been your fault !"; a pair of dark socks for the Bishop to keep in his briefcase, since at a recent meeting he forgot to bring any.

I present the birthday boys with floral satin ties. The superintendent loves it, and hangs it around his neck with the one he has already received. The Bishop looks skeptically at his. "This is not a gag gift," I assure him. "It's very trendy." He seems unconvinced.

There is a pause. Out of the house there suddenly appears the most amazing and unexpected sight: what appears to be a rather

large-framed, amply-endowed woman approaches the group. She has shoulder-length hair topped by a bow. Her tall boots are topped by a mini-skirt, while a sweater and long beads complete the ensemble. When she speaks, we know it is Geraldine, a la Flip Wilson.

Geraldine delivers a monologue of at least twenty minutes length, directed toward the Bishop for his birthday, telling him of the personal quirks and flaws of each of the Cabinet members in turn. She warns him that they are not to be trusted - and then proceeds to tell him exactly why.

We laugh until we can scarcely breath. The content of the monologue is exceptionally clever, with just enough of hint of the truth to make it irresistible. But equally hilarious is the Cabinet member who has temporarily assumed Geraldine's identity. He is normally the soul of dignity, often serious, rather quiet and soft-spoken - clearly the last we would expect to appear in mini-skirt and wig.

Later we go into the house for birthday cake and ice cream. The Bishop begs Geraldine to appear one more time on another occasion with a video camera present. But there are some things even the Bishop cannot request, and Geraldine's alter-ego firmly refuses. "Oh please," says the Bishop. "I give you my solemn word that it will never be shown to anyone but immediate family and the Council of Bishops!"

HOW OTHER CABINETS BUILD COMMUNITY
Results of the Survey of the Bishops

OUR DEBT TO OTHERS

No one group can lay claim to all the answers or worthy ideas about any subject, perhaps least of all so subjective an area as community-building. Our Cabinet is indebted to those that have preceded us. Life together has been build, to some measure, upon their experiences: what has worked well, and what has been less successful; things that have made for support and community, and things that have had the opposite effect. The continual entering and exiting of personalities, each bringing unique coloration to the life of the group, has contributed to the richness of the community.

Sometimes we are only dimly aware of this reality. Where did a certain custom come from? Who originated our way of doing things? Some are the specific contributions of those who are presently members of the Cabinet, but some are not. It is only six years - the maximum term for a district superintendent - from a brand new idea to "we've always done it this way." Even the bishop, who has the possibility for providing greater continuity, is currently limited to an absolute maximum of 12 years.

So we acknowledge our debt to all who have sat around the table in

years past.

Another valuable resource for the shaping of the communal lives of cabinets is other cabinets within the Connection. This is at best an informal networking of ideas and experiences, almost always an incidental feature of gathering for other purposes.

We may attend a meeting where there are colleagues from other annual conferences, and in spontaneous conversation hear something of how life is conducted in the cabinets from which they come. A good idea will perhaps then be imported to our own cabinet.

When our episcopal leaders have access to one another, surely this kind of information is exchanged, although probably around the dinner table or in the hallways.

In this manner we may resource each other, and influence the lives of one another without always being aware of it. One of the features of this project is to attempt to provide some of the kind of information that is exchanged informally, specifically in the area of cabinet community-building, in a broader way.

FINDING OUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

In January and February of 1991, letters and one-page questionnaires were sent to 47 active United Methodist bishops in

North America. Ten questions, some with more than one part, were asked that directly related to the corporate life of their cabinets. (See pages 141 - 142 in the Appendixes.)

The bishops were requested to provide information for inclusion in this document, and as a possible means of resourcing others.

Forty-three of the bishops replied. The surprisingly high percentage of responses in of itself points to some interest on the part of the respondents. Several asked that the results of the survey be shared with them. The richness and variety with which many of them describe the cabinet life over which they preside gives hopeful evidence that community is regarded very seriously. The abundance of good ideas for building the Body is heartening, not only for the sake of cabinets, but for the vitality of the Church.

HOW INCLUSIVE ARE OUR CABINETS?

This question is important, not only as a justice issue, but also for how it impacts the corporate life of the Body. If diversity builds both strength and a broadening of the gifts available to and through the cabinet, it would seem significant to have as much variety as is practical.

According to the bishops' responses, in the past five years, 32 of

our cabinets have had one or more female district superintendents sit around the table. Nine have not had that experience.

Thirty-four cabinets have been enriched by ethnic presence. Seven have not. Twenty-eight groups have included persons over the age of sixty, while twelve have not.

Sixteen of our cabinets have had at least one member who has been under the age of forty. Twenty-three have had no one under forty.

HOW OFTEN AND HOW LONG?

One factor the Cabinet in West Virginia identified as contributing to the building of community was the frequency and length of meetings. For us to gather fairly frequently and overnight seemed to have a positive bearing on strengthening the Body.

Bishops were asked to indicate how often their cabinets met, and how long the meetings lasted. The responses indicated much more variety than I would have imagined. Cabinets meet, ranging from eight times per year, to 59 times per year. The length of meetings varies from three full weeks at appointment time, to half-day gatherings reported by two annual conferences.

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

The West Virginia Cabinet almost unanimously pointed to worship as the primary glue that bonds us. According to the results of the survey of the bishops, other cabinets also recognize the importance of worshipping together. Forty-seven cabinets have an organized worship experience as a normal part of the agenda when their cabinets are in session.

In response to the questionnaire's tenth and final question ("What rituals, customs and experiences strengthen the sense of community in your cabinet?"), worship was frequently highlighted as a major contributor:

> Opening worship every session.
>
> Each meeting opens with a time of sharing pastoral concerns and prayer.
>
> Daily worship at meeting;
>
> Covenant Bible prayer group;
>
> Prayers for each other;
>
> Each meeting opens with worship.
>
> ...well-prepared worship at the opening...[1]

In most instances the leadership for worship is shared by all the members of the cabinet, including the bishop. In a few cases, the bishop or the dean of the cabinet assumes that responsibility

alone. In an occasional situation, only the other cabinet members lead worship.

Thirty-four of the cabinets have shared the Eucharist, some regularly. Thirteen have never had this experience together.

Only three bishops reported that their cabinets do not regularly plan some kind of worship event as part of cabinet life.

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

West Virginia's Cabinet identified the sharing of at least one meal a day when we are together as an important part of the common life. That meal becomes an event, and takes on Eucharistic proportions. Most other cabinets would seem to agree, since the majority habitually share meals together. Twenty-five cabinets always do, while 14 report that they often eat together. Nine of the bishops say their cabinets sometimes have meals collectively.

The breaking of bread around a meal appears to have great significance for cabinets. Meal times were frequently identified as important in Body-building as a response to the questionnaire's final question ("What rituals, customs and experiences strengthen the sense of community in your cabinet?").

> Usually all of us have lunch each day. In addition, a number of them stay at the same hotel and often have dinner and/or breakfast together.
>
> Fellowship over meals;
>
> The sharing of common meals;
>
> Special dinner[s] during long cabinet sessions;[2]

SOUNDING A RETREAT

Only one bishop reports that the cabinet has never had a retreat, although the 47 who say they do sometimes mean different things by the word "retreat." Three bishops describe retreats as enlarged work sessions for the purposes of appointment-making or other kinds of work and agenda-related activities.

Most cabinets define retreats, however, as a time apart when the regular schedule is set aside for some other objective. One annual conference has retreated once; three have had retreats occasionally. Twenty-five have annual retreats, while nineteen have them more than annually.

The intention for these is equally varied, and the same cabinet may hold successive retreats for differing purposes. The same retreat may also include several rationales. Forty-two report having had one for spiritual formation, with twenty-seven saying that personal growth has been an aim. Thirty-four point to intellectual development as a primary purpose for retreating, while the category

of recreation has been identified twenty-seven times. Rest is the least likely of the reasons a cabinet has for retreating, with only sixteen describing retreats in that fashion.

Other reasons for retreats that were mentioned once include:

purely social
team building
discussion of ministry
fellowship with spouses
planning
visioning
preparation for appointment-making

Question Ten again provided opportunity for the bishops to point out on behalf of their cabinets how important these times apart are to the life of the community, especially when spouses are included. Recreational times serve the same purpose, knitting the group together with ties of love and laughter.

> Many meetings at our Retreat Center - relaxed, shared community and fellowship with cabinet and spouses.
>
> Occasional trips...and social times with spouses...
>
> fellowship gatherings frequently with spouses too...
>
> shared playtime...
>
> ...humor, retreats,...
>
> playing together (fishing, golfing, hunting, hot-tubbing, partying, joking, pranks).
>
> Summer recreational times with spouses on lake...
>
> Baseball games...

Scheduled playtime on the evening of multiple day meetings;

ADDITIONAL WAYS THE BODY IS BUILT

Only six of the respondents did not include an answer to Question Ten. Most of the bishops were willing to take the additional moment to share the components of community-building which are significant in their own cabinets, by answering an essay-type question.

Some additional good ideas for strengthening the corporate life that came from those answers include:

Observation of birthdays, anniversaries, and other special family events;

frequent support telephone calls;

shared projects (one cabinet worked together on Habitat for Humanity);

dinner at the episcopal residence;

strong support during illness, death, or other family crisis;

Bishop spends a weekend with the superintendent's family four times a year while in the district;

One hour set aside in each multiple day cabinet meeting for a continuing education event on an assigned topic led by one of the superintendents;

an annual three-hour evaluation, feedback, and goal-setting interview for each superintendent with the bishop;

sharing of joys and concerns about personal lives, districts, and annual conference;

the annual Christmas party;

one cabinet has an Epiphany party instead of a Christmas party;[4]

One bishop is in the process of informally preparing a booklet of cabinet rituals, marking the seasons of the cabinet's life. She is creating the rituals as they go through the year.[5]

ENTERING THE CABINET FAMILY

Question Eight on the survey had to do with the entering of new persons into the life of the cabinet. Bishops were asked to indicate if any ways had been devised to mark such an entrance, and if appropriate, to describe how it was done.

Eleven of the respondents revealed that nothing special was done when new cabinet members joined the group, but thirty-six said that a particular effort was made to incorporate the newcomers. Most provide some kind of in-house orientation in addition to that supplied by the General Church at Lake Junaluska. Sometimes this more particularized training is done by the bishop, and sometimes by more seasoned cabinet members.

Most of the neophytes are introduced before the Annual Conference, and some have a special service of celebration within the district they are appointed to serve. Many are invited to sit in with the Cabinet prior to actually beginning their superintendency, for a kind of intern/observer experience.

> DS designates share in the appointment-making process the year immediately preceding their assuming office;
>
> ...involvement with the cabinet immediately following the announcement of appointment;
>
> After appointment is announced and prior to assuming responsibility, they attend cabinet activities;
>
> [they are] invited to first appointment meeting as observers; wives (to date) enjoy special social times at most of our meetings;
>
> Brief welcoming ceremony conducted by another DS [which is] humorous, supportive...[6]

Some groups welcome beginning cabinet members with small gifts, such as the presentation of a cabinet mug at the first meeting, or the conferral of The Book of Discipline, Bible, and a gavel at a service in the district.

Several bishops report the assignment of a mentor to provide special relationship and guidance for the new district superintendent.

WHEN THE TERM OF OFFICE IS OVER

Slightly more cabinets have rituals of exit than entrance. Thirty-nine of the bishops noted some kind of exiting process, while eight said none existed in their cabinets. Many mark the occasion with a special meal and parting gifts. Sometimes the presents are intended to amuse, sometimes meant to become cherished heirloom

reminders of years on the cabinet. One group has a traditional gift that is given to all who exit the cabinet: a white dress shirt and a conservative tie, presumably to help the superintendent make an appropriate re-entry into the local church!

A "roast" is often held; sometimes there are times set aside for sharing personal remembrances. One group structures an hour for each exiting superintendent to reflect on their learnings and continuing issues of concern. Spouses are nearly always included in these exiting procedures.

Recognition on the floor of the Annual Conference is often featured, sometimes with the presentation of a plaque, a Bible from the bishop, or a gift of appreciation from the Conference. One Annual Conference has a special service of transition.

(A numerical tabulation of the answers provided by the survey of the bishops may be found in the Appendixes on page 142.)

1. Taken from responses to "Questions About the Life of the Cabinet," survey of the Bishops, 1991.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

SUMMARY

> ...We best celebrate God's presence among us as a community. The substance of the Christian life essentially is the result of God's continuing action to link us to [Godself] and one another.[1]
>
> Roger L. Smith

SOME PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

As I enter the final year of my term as superintendent of the Wheeling District, I recognize this period of my life and ministry as being one of the greatest privileges and joys I have ever experienced. Reflection leads me to believe that the single most important component in making it so has to do with the sense of community which I enjoy both in the District and on the Cabinet.

Yet it is the Cabinet experience which remains primary for me. Without the perception of belonging, support, understanding and accountability which the Cabinet provides me, the encounter with the District would be a far less satisfactory experience. Next to my family, it has been our Bishop and my brother and sister superintendents who have most clearly been the means of Grace which has energized and shaped my own superintendency.

I believe I knew this in a somewhat dim and unfocused way before beginning the project. However, working in the area of the Cabinet's community life has highlighted this reality for me in a new way.

Through the program I have additionally been able to spend some effort in exploring the Biblical foundations which mandate community life for Christian people. It is not simply for our own benefit that we are called into unity with each other, but for the sake of the world. The practical applications for the Church and the world are staggering indeed, and may in the last analysis be our final and best hope.

At the very beginning of this document I referred to advise given to our Doctor of Ministries peer group regarding the selection of a topic for our projects: "Discover what you feel passionate about, and you will have uncovered the area in which you will do your work." I have discovered/rediscovered not only that I have a passion for community life and need it to survive and function, but that I also have some gifts in this area. This has helped me to intentionally spend some additional time and effort in acting as a community builder in my own Cabinet, within the peer group at the seminary, and in the District.

The anticipation of preparing this paper caused me no little anxiety. The actual work proved to be exhilarating, exciting, and sometimes just plain fun. Without a doubt the process was valuable to our Cabinet, drawing us closer together and more committed to our community life. It was an experience of profound spiritual dimension for us all.

My continuing conviction is that district superintendents, like all Christians, need a community of faith out of which they may grow as disciples, and be supported in the work of their discipleship.

Within such a community, the wellspring from which they are able to nourish the people they serve is constantly replenished. Their wounds can be healed; their spiritual lives deepened. The courage to continue, the will to hope, the power to love, the boldness to allow themselves to be loved; all of these and more are found within the Body of Christ, into which they were baptized.

The clearest, most available expression of the Body of Christ for those who function as district superintendents, can be the cabinet. Many have found it to be so; others long for it to be so. The building of that Body, as it is with other physical bodies, takes energy and intentionality on the part of the members. In the final analysis all growth in community comes from God; but God has chosen to be in partnership with us, and has allowed us the privilege of being co-workers in the work of building the Body.

There are encouraging signs that increasingly both episcopal leaders and members of cabinets recognize the theological importance and the practical application of the cabinet as the Body of Christ. The days when the image of either bishop or superintendent as Lone Ranger - isolated, aloof, calculatingly

political - are rapidly passing. More and more, the Church tends to elect persons to the episcopacy who are pastoral, and who understand and can help build community. These bishops are inclined to select persons to be district superintendents who are also pastoral Body-builders.

The implication for the whole of the Church, as we seek to reconnect with our Covenantal roots, is promising indeed. Wherever two or three of us are gathered intentionally in his name, Christ is among us in a special way. We see him most clearly in the faces of each other. We love him most completely as we learn to love and care for one another. We experience his power most conclusively when we empower and enable each brother and sister.

1. Roger L. Smith, "The Discovery of Community Around the Lord's Table" (D. Min. project, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, 1986), 97.

EVALUATIONS

FROM THE WEST VIRGINIA CABINET

Portions of the project have been distributed to members of the West Virginia Cabinet as they have been completed. Evaluations forms were also given to cabinet members, with the request that they be filled out and returned to me for inclusion in this document.

By way of summary, the Cabinet generally felt that our story has been adequately told, although nearly everyone had additional things they would liked to have seen included: more about worship, more about specific events, additional illustrations of how unity comes out of our diversity, openness and sharing.

No Cabinet member felt that any of the material incorporated into the project was inappropriate or violated confidences.

The majority of the superintendents felt that the Cabinet's participation in providing information for this document through our structured conversations was helpful to the group. It has enhanced our community life.

The evaluations of the district superintendents follow, with their permission.

FROM MY OWN PERSPECTIVE

There has been more interest in the subject of this project than I would have initially anticipated. Early in the process, members of the doctoral group to which I belong urged me to consider writing about the cabinet life in the West Virginia Annual Conference. They have consistently expressed interest and encouragement. Without their urging and reassurance regarding the significance of the project, I may not have been able to generate sufficient courage and energy to do the work.

The West Virginia Cabinet generously and enthusiastically agreed to be the focus of the project, although for them it meant a claim on additional time from an already too-crowded schedule. It soon became "our work" instead of "Patricia's work." Indeed, the project rested on their participation. Resistance from the Cabinet would have meant the selection of another topic for me.

The survey sent to the bishops garnered a far more enthusiastic response than I would ever have imagined. Forty-seven were mailed. Forty-three were returned in time to be included in this document. Three more were returned late, indicating non-response from only one of the bishops. Several of them worked through the ten questions with their cabinets, thereby raising consciousness regarding corporate life.

One of the values of this experience for me personally is a clear reminder that nothing is done in isolation, but at some level always in community. We are far more dependant and interwoven than we sometimes imagine. Whatever we can do to deliberately strengthen the bonds between us will ultimately strengthen us as individuals, enrich our lives and enhance the ministry we do.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

Once again I need your help! Please complete this one-page form after you have finished reading the document I have distributed to you. Should you need more space, use the back of the paper. Thanks for this assistance, as well as for all you have done in past days.

1. Has our story been told?

   Yes

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   The supportive spirit of the community has been vital. The openness, honesty and covenant have been kept cloaked in Agape by all.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   The sharing has been enlightening. The questions and prodding of Patricia have been nurturing. The project has enhanced a broader and better understanding of "community of the cabinet".

C.W.B.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Beautifully, and with an evangelical hopefulness!

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   How about the birthday celebrations and the gift giving to departing cabinet members? And perhaps the Christmas Party and sharing of crafted gifts? These have been exceptionally memorable to me!

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   None, as far as I can discern.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   This community life which nourishes my spirit comes as a beautiful climax to my years of pastoral ministry. To have had the opportunity to reflect upon it has enhanced it for me. You have given us a beautiful gift. My prayers are with you Patricia.

   Shalom,
   Harry

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Yes, in magnificent ways. The methods of "Images" and direct quotes help focus the experience and make it real for the reader.

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   The openness between Bishop and Cabinet was especially evident in last night's "Birthday Roast." This might well be a part of the presentation.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Our participation in the project has helped us see who we are--and what we have.

LS

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
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TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Very well in a creative way. You let us tell our own story-your organization is excellent!

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   There is a special openness in "work and play" which our community makes possible with our Bishop. He is truly one of us and we are free to joke and fellowship with one another.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Wow! It has been a blessing and is truly a freeing process!

DJ

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Yes--and it "gets out", some of the nuggets
   May be picked up and fondled..

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   I think the "Community understanding" could be strengthened by some examples of how really diverse individuals (which we are) do achieve, in actual Situations, remarkable unity.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   Nope--it all fits.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Considerably! I am not, by nature, a very reflective and expressive person--but talking about <u>our life together</u> in worship and work has increased my awareness of it...and deepened my appreciation for it.

L.C.F.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
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TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Wish more was said about worship experiences and the honest, open sharing/bearing of one's soul that is done there. That doesn't just happen: acceptance, love, openness enable it to happen.

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   Leo's portrayal of Geraldine as a illustration of "Developing the Funny bone." How many D.S.'s would have had the "guts" and how many Bishops and Cabinets the openness for this to happen. What about the way we deal with "problem pastors"--team approval rather than Lone Ranger?

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Being new to the cabinet makes it difficult to determine whether our life together is enhanced by this project or if what I am and have been experiencing is part of the settling in process.

J.R.C.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Yes

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   No

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Focusing on the corporate life of the cabinet has made for easy entrance into the covenant relationship.

J.W.T.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

Once again I need your help! Please complete this one-page form after you have finished reading the document I have distributed to you. Should you need more space, use the back of the paper. Thanks for this assistance, as well as for all you have done in past days.

1. Has our story been told?

   Yes, in a concise, well-organized manner the format and flow is super!

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   None that come to mind.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   I agree wholeheartedly--the process has helped capitalize on insights--to accentuate what we could easily come to take for granted.

Roger

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Yes, but the writer's perspectives of community are greater and different then mine. She was looking and listening. waiting and watching for community and I was not. I experienced some of it with joy.

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   Not necessarily I believe we are a community that loves each other, but we really do not know and understand the pressure and stress we have as individual D.S.'s. Can we really? Do we work together in appointment-making for the good of the church?

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No, it seems in order. If there is a weakness in the material for me, it is in not mentioning some of the trying stressful times when we are a collection of individuals and not a covenant community.

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   Yes, the sharing times were very positive. Listening to each other's thoughts and feelings is helpful. Pulling as a team. I have been a part of a covenant community in the WV Annual Conference for 25 years-intentional small groups that care, share, study, pray, cry and say goodbye. My best experiences came in the 3 year yokefellow group experience. I needed it!

T.D.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

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1. Has our story been told?

   Yes

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   Eating together in each others houses when Cabinet meets in different districts-our time together at Christmas time and Conference Time (Especially Sunday before Conference when we laugh together)-Birthday Celebrations.

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   This project has made me more aware of the dynamics of Community Building.

A.B.

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT
BUILDING THE BODY: THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE CABINET

TO: Members of the Cabinet, WV Annual Conference
FROM: Patricia

Once again I need your help! Please complete this one-page form after you have finished reading the document I have distributed to you. Should you need more space, use the back of the paper. Thanks for this assistance, as well as for all you have done in past days.

1. Has our story been told?

   Exceedingly well!!

2. Are there any additional features from our corporate life that need to be lifted up?

   No

3. Is there any information included about the life of our community that in your opinion seems inappropriate for inclusion?

   No

4. My own awareness of the dynamics of our life together as well as my appreciation for it has been greatly enhanced by understanding this project. How about you?

   I have been personally enriched by your project. Our corporate life has been strengthened by the shared reflection.

William [redacted]

APPENDIXES

EXITING PROCESS FOR DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

1. In the months leading up to the time when a District Superintendent will no longer be a part of the Cabinet, the Cabinet will have times in Cabinet meetings for the sharing of joys, griefs, anticipations.

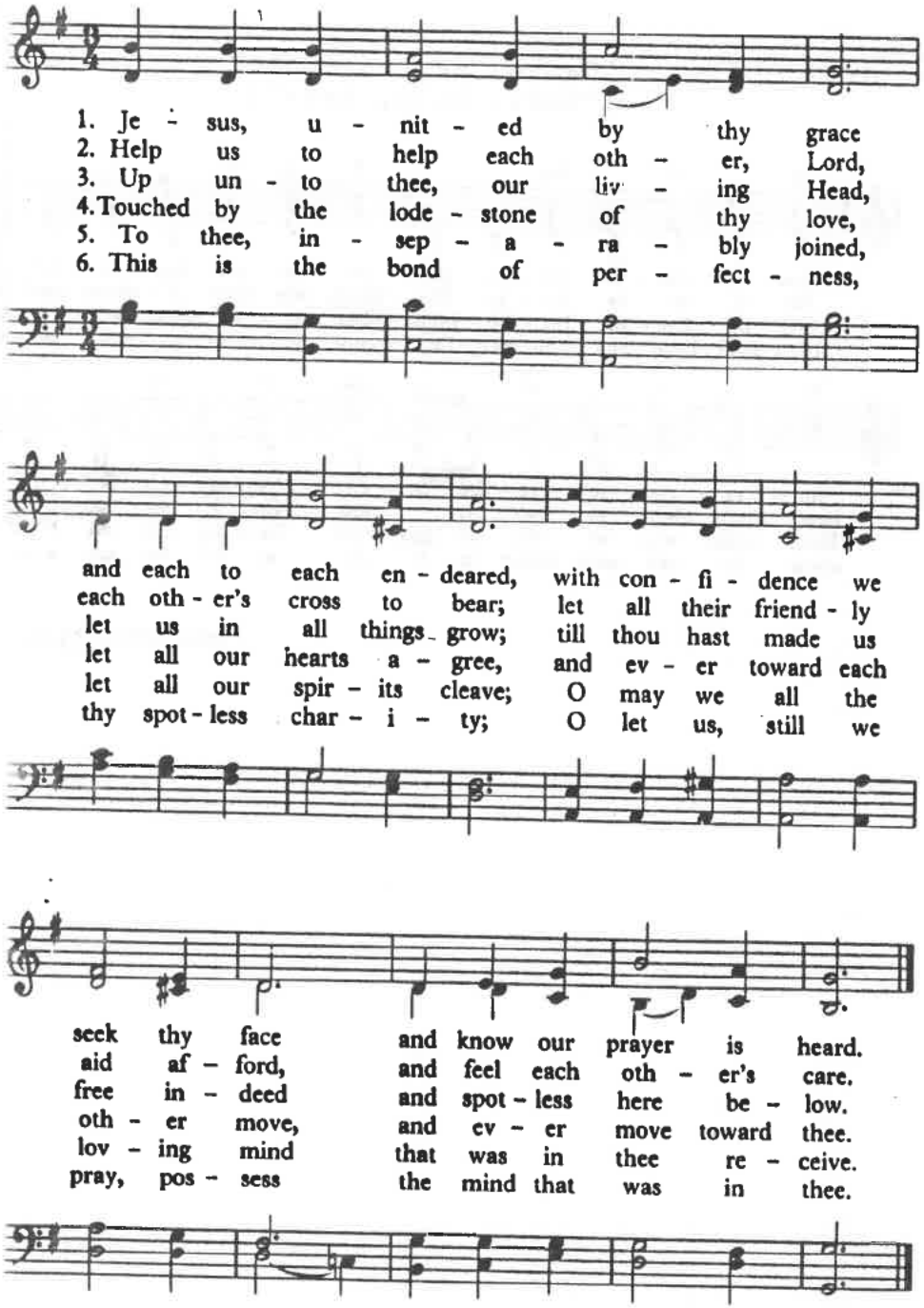
2. We will have a "time of affirming" -- where other members of the Cabinet may speak of the gifts that the exiting Superintendent has brought to the Cabinet, and also how these gifts will be useful in Pastoral ministry.

3. At a Cabinet meeting near the end of the term, one of the Cabinet worship services will contain a "Sending Forth" in similar manner to our current practice of having a "Welcome to the Cabinet" in an early Cabinet worship service for newly appointed District Superintendents.

4. A Re-orientation Team will be made available to the exiting Superintendent, to share their experiences and adjustments with re-entry to Pastoral ministry. This Team, named by the Bishop, may be composed of those who recently served as Superintendents and/or others.

5. We recognize the need for sensitivity on the part of many persons, including the District Superintendent in whose District the former Superintendent is now appointed. Along with the Pastoral care given to each Pastor will come the sensitivity to help with special needs for a person involved in this re-entry.

Jesus, United by Thy Grace


1. Je - sus, u - nit - ed by thy grace
2. Help us to help each oth - er, Lord,
3. Up un - to thee, our liv - ing Head,
4. Touched by the lode - stone of thy love,
5. To thee, in - sep - a - ra - bly joined,
6. This is the bond of per - fect - ness,
and each to each en - deared, with con - fi - dence we
each oth - er's cross to bear; let all their friend - ly
let us in all things grow; till thou hast made us
let all our hearts a - gree, and ev - er toward each
let all our spir - its cleave; O may we all the
thy spot - less char - i - ty; O let us, still we
seek thy face and know our prayer is heard.
aid af - ford, and feel each oth - er's care.
free in - deed and spot - less here be - low.
oth - er move, and ev - er move toward thee.
lov - ing mind that was in thee re - ceive.
pray, pos - sess the mind that was in thee.

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1742
MUSIC: John B. Dykes, 1866

ST. AGNES
CM

A EUCHARIST OF WELCOMING

FOR

SUE C. JARRETT

RALPH P.THOMPSON, JR.

CABINET WORSHIP

March 6, 1991

Bishop William Boyd Grove, Celebrant

The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

The congregation sings hymns while the bread and cup are given.

When all have received, the Lord's table is put in order.

The pastor or congregation may then give thanks after Communion.

HYMN OR SONG

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

Go forth in peace.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

Amen.

GOING FORTH

A SERVICE OF WORD AND TABLE II

A congregation may use this text beginning with the invitation to the Lord's table. Preceding parts of the service are guided by a bulletin or by announcement.

The people gather in the Lord's name.
They offer prayer and praise.
The Scriptures are read and preached.
Responses of praise, faith, and prayer are offered.
The service continues with the invitation to the Lord's table.

INVITATION

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another.
Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

Merciful God,
we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have failed to be an obedient church.
We have not done your will,
we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.
Forgive us, we pray.
Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All pray in silence.

Leader to people:

Hear the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People to leader:

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Leader and people:

Glory to God. Amen.

THE PEACE

Let us offer one another signs of reconciliation and love.
All exchange signs and words of God's peace.

CABINET WORSHIP

Wednesday, January 30, 1991

A HEALING SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

We remember the words of the Apostle James who wrote: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church, and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the Name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and will the Lord will raise them up."

GREETING

Leader: *May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

We gather this morning to lift up our brothers and sister before the Lord that we might receive healing.

Let those who seek God's healing open their hearts to the Spirit of the Lord.

Bless the Lord, O my soul;

People: ***And all that is within me, Bless God's holy name!***

Leader: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits,*

People: ***The Lord forgives all our iniquity, and heals all our diseases.***

Leader: *The Lord redeems our lives from the pit, and crowns us with steadfast love and mercy.*

People: ***God satisfies us with Good as long as we live so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's.***

Leader: *Bless the Lord, O my soul;*

People: ***And all that is within me, Bless God's holy name!***

HYMN OF PRAISE 375 *"There Is a Balm in Gilead"*

PRAYERS FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS
WITH ANOINTING AND LAYING ON OF HANDS

N., I anoint you with oil
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
N., we lay our hands on you in the name of Our Lord
Jesus Christ .
May the power of God's indwelling presence
heal you of all illness of body, mind, spirit,
and relationships.
May you serve God with a loving heart. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER ANOINTING AND LAYING ON OF HANDS

Almighty God,
we pray that our brothers and sister
may be comforted in their suffering.
When they are afraid, give them courage;
when they feel weak, grant them your strength;
when they are afflicted, afford them patience;
when they are lost, offer them hope;
when they are alone, move us to their side.
In the name of Jesus Christ, the Comforter, we pray.
Amen.

SHARING OF THANKSGIVINGS

HYMN OF ASSURANCE 377 "It Is Well with My Soul"

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

The Lord who heals all your iniquity bless and keep you;
the face of the Lord who heals all your afflictions
shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the light of the countenance of the Lord who redeems
your life be lifted upon you and give you peace.
Amen.

This service is one of the Services of Healing that is being proposed for the New Book of Worship. I have adapted it for Cabinet worship. The service includes the Eucharist and other acts of worship. The Pyx is my gift to you. They are available from James Wagner's office at The Upper Room.

CABINET WORSHIP

Tuesday, July 10, 1990

A CALL TO WORSHIP "God Of All"

Dan: God of Moses, saved in the river;
Lawrence: God of Israel, freed from Egypt, freed from the desert;
Patricia: God of the slain lamb, powerless Lion of Judah;
Leo: God of Brazil, of the millions exploited by the black magic of growth;
Tom: God of Mexico, of the ambivalence of the revolution;
Roger: God of New York, London, Paris, Moscow, Berlin, Los Angeles, of disappointment and of new life;
Clyde: God of theologians, deceived by the wind of doctrine;
Harry: God of the bureaucrats, nervously searching for new programs;
Bill: God of Africa, of a growing church in a land of exploitation;
Bishop: God of the religious people, caught in the projection of their own mind;
Tom: God of the conservatives, of the burning desire to save souls;
John: God of the liberals, dreaming of reform;
Roger: God of the radicals, dreaming of revolution;
Aslam: God of the artists, creativity of humanity;
Clyde: God of the technocrats, enslaved by the power they hold;
Leo: God of the exploiters, lovers of power;
Dan: God of the Christians between faith and unfaith;
Lawrence: God of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ;
Patricia: God of those who have heard of Christ but see only his people;

ALL: GOD OF US ALL--
GOD OF ALL MEN AND WOMEN,
SURPRISE US ANEW THIS DAY WITH YOUR FAITHFULNESS,
SAVE US FOR THIS DAY

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (Together)

O God, as we worship, make yourself known to us--surprise us with your presence. If we have doubts, help us not to fear them but, rather, help us to find your presence in the ache of our uncertainty. If we have questions, relieve us of the burning need always to find answers, and help us to understand that in the darkness of things

*AN ORDER FOR PRAISE AND PRAYER**

PROCLAMATION OF THE LIGHT

(A candle is lit and lifted in the midst of the community).

L. Light and peace in Jesus Christ.
P. Thanks be to God.

HYMN "This Little Light of Mine" No. 585

This little light of mine, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
this little light of mine, I'm goin'-a let it shine;
this little light of mine, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. (let it shine)

Everywhere I go, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
everywhere I go, I'm goin'-a let it shine;
everywhere I go, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. (let it shine)

All through the night, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
all through the night, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
all through the night, I'm goin'-a let it shine,
let it shine, let it shine, let it shine. (let it shine)

PRAYER

All:

***O God,** your Spirit is intertwined with ours in ways we can scarcely fathom: You are the vine, we the branches. As we remain immersed in your inexhaustible love and depth we are given strength and joy in life. We praise you, God, that you have given all people the precious gift of your Spirit. We pray that we might experience the Spirit's presence more fully, for we see but dimly, hear but faintly, and scarcely feel the brush of your sheltering wings. To those who remain suspicious of joy, come, O Spirit, with love like wine. To those whose lives remain untouched by hope, come, O Spirit, bearing the mysterious suggestions of dream and vision. To those caught in the small circle of self-concern, come as fire and kindle compassion as intense as that of Jesus. To those who feel unworthy of being your servants, O Spirit, come as gracefully as the cooling breeze and claim your servants.**

Amen.

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 6:1-6

MORNING WORSHIP

NOVEMBER 29, 1990

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Leader: Listen! The God of Abraham neither slumbers nor sleeps.
People: Yet we sometimes lose track of God in the chaos of our world.
Leader: Hear the Good News: Jesus is coming again to fulfill God's Word!
People: Let us rejoice and get ready for that glorious event!

HYMN NO. 211 "O Come, O Come Emmanual" with Antiphon

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE
Prayers of petition or intercession. Each prayer shall be concluded: "Lord, in your mercy," and all respond: "Hear our prayer."

SCRIPTURE John 1:1-9
Isaiah 9:1-2

MEDITATION "Light For The Darkness"

No. 201 "Advent Prayer"

GOING FORTH:

Leader: Go forth as light-bearers and peacemakers, heralds of God's good news to the world.
People: What a joy it is to be God's messengers, to end oppression and proclaim justice.
Leader: Renounce irreligious and worldly passions, for God sets you free from bondage to things.
People: How exhilarating it is to venture in new paths without the burden of envy and greed.
Leader: Christ comes as God's greatest gift, to redeem us from all iniquity.
People: We venture forth, eager to do good and live sensitive, balanced and purpose-filled lives.
Leader: See for yourselves what God has done. Live among others the good news of great joy.
People: We go from this time of worship, glorifying and praising God for all we have seen and heard.
Leader: Go in peace.
People: Amen!

THE CABINET AT WORSHIP

April 23,1991

Call to Praise and Prayer

L: Oh Lord, open our lips.

P: And we shall declare your praise.

The Hymn	"Lord God, Your Love Has Called Us Here" (tune: St. Catherine)	579
Affirmation of Faith	Romans 8:35, 37-39	887
The Psalter	Psalm 23 - Response 1	754

The Prayers of the Community
(after each petition, "Lord in your mercy," community response: "Hear our prayer.")

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture Lesson — I Corinthians 12:12-27

Meditation

The Hymn — "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath" — 60

The Passing of the Blessing Cup

The Benediction

Spiritual Discernment in Appointment Making

Premises (all premises in our paper *Appointment Making in the W. Va. Conference* remain in force, plus the following:

1. Our goal is to seek and find God's direction as we make appointments.

2. Our appointment-making will grow out of our corporate spirituality.

3. During the season of appointment-making, we covenant to fast and pray while we are separated between cabinet meetings as a means of preparation for our corporate work.

4. Wherever possible we will decide by consensus.

Procedure

1. Each session of appointment-making will begin with a period of silent listening "centering" prayer, and we will return to such prayer continually throughout the process.

2. When an appointment is under consideration the superintendent of the "open church" shall define the needs of the church as discerned through consultation with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and her/his own expereinces with the congregation(s).

3. All superintendents shall have the opportunity to propose persons to be considered for the appointment. Each superintendent may nominate from the entire conference beginning with her/his district.

4. The cabinet will reduce nominations to four followed by a period of centering and listening.

5. Members of the cabinet will share insights received during this period.

6. Each superintendent will have the opportunity to indicate her/his preference for the appointment with the superintendent of the "open church" listening, seeking discernment through the judgment of colleagues, and speaking last. If consensus is not present, the cabinet may choose to continue the process, or the cabinet/bishop may decide that it is necessary to move ahead.

7. The bishop, having sought discernment through careful listening to the reports of consultation with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and to the members of the Cabinet, will make the appointment.

8. This process shall also be used when a cluster of interrelated appointments are under consideration.

1/91
J24a

Covered-dish dinners notwithstanding, this 'obese' superintendent fights back

Reporter Staff Special

"I cannot condemn the covered dish dinners at our United Methodist churches, because in the Gospel we learn that the best times are when we sit down at the table," says the Rev. Daniel B. Johnson, superintendent of the Parkersburg District in the West Virginia Annual Conference.

"However, we are not helping people by encouraging obesity in the church."

In 1989, Mr. Johnson, who described himself as "being an obese person all my life," became superintendent over 65 charges, composed of 150 local churches.

"It was then that I started feeling real conscious of my witness as a district superintendent who was obese," said the 45-year-old minister.

"My first year as a superintendent I put on 40 pounds. That's when I made my commitment to lose weight."

A year ago, when he started the diet, Mr. Johnson weighed 315. Today: 194.

Regarding his determination to lose weight, he said, "It's the old concept of modeling: everyone models after someone, including local church pastors. But in my present role, being in front of pastors and lay people as I was, it became extremely obvious to me what I was modeling.

"At one time I was even providing unnecessary foods during district functions. I've stopped doing it, and no one has complained. My district pastors and my colleagues on the cabinet have been truly supportive."

Mr. Johnson said he began to set the tone for a healthier district by either choosing not to eat at church functions or by bringing his own low-calorie meals.

He added that, for the first time, he feels "more in control" of his life.

After gaining confidence that he could lose weight, he began an intensive, medically formulated diet under supervision of a physician.

Mr. Johnson said he has kept his weight down for five months and plans to continue. He said his wife and children are extremely positive about his weight-loss program.

"My kids have never said anything about my weight, but now they comment because I'm not sedentary."

"We exercise and ride bikes together. They are pleased with how I look, and it is a motivation not to slip back. I am committed to that because it's got to be a daily discipline."

Churches rally behind burned-out businessman

United Methodist News Service

Churches in Blissfield, Mich., have rallied around a Palestinian-American who was a victim of anti-Arab hostility.

The Dairy Queen owned by Kareem Khoury—who attends and teaches Sunday School at Blissfield's First United Methodist Church—was vandalized Jan. 18 and destroyed by fire four days later.

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WHEELING DISTRICT

The Methodist Building, Room 111 / Wheeling, WV 26003 / (304) 232-5687

Bishop John W. Russell
464 Bailey
Ft. Worth, TX 76133

January 18, 1991

Dear Bishop Russell:

Greetings to you in the name of the Lord Jesus, from West Virginia!

I am one of 19 district superintendents doing Doctorate of Ministries work through United Theological Seminary in Dayton. Our group has been working together for a year and a half on the general subject of "The District Superintendent: Bond of Denominational Vitalization."

My special slice of this comprehensive topic has to do with the community life of the cabinet. While the bulk of my work will come from experiences in the West Virginia cabinet, I am eager to include information about the corporate life of other cabinets in the final document.

I am convinced that some of our effectiveness as superintendents is impacted by the efforts to intentionally strengthen our life together. I'm equally persuaded that every cabinet has some good ideas to share in this area.

Please take a moment from your busy day to complete the enclosed one-page sheet - I doubt that it will take more than five or ten minutes. It will assist me greatly in my project, and may become a resource to others.

Many thanks for your help!

Sincerely,

Patricia Jarvis

Patricia A. Jarvis

Patricia Jarvis
Rm 111 - Methd. Bldg.
Wheeling,WV 26003

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LIFE OF THE CABINET

NUMERICAL TABULATION

1. How many persons, including the Bishop, make up the appointive Cabinet in your Annual Conference(s)?

   Answers ranged from 5 to 19.

2. In the last 5 years, how many cabinet members have been:

have had female	have had ethnic	have had over 60	have had under 40
32	34	28	16
none: 9	none: 7	none: 12	none: 23

3. How often does your Cabinet meet?

   Answers varied widely: from 59 times annually to 8 times yearly.

4. How long do most meetings last?

   Again, wide variety: from 59 times yearly to 8 times yearly.

5. Is any organized worship experience a normal part of the agenda when the Cabinet is in session? [47] YES [3] NO

   5a. If yes, who assumes leadership? [32] BISHOP [30] DEAN [40] OTHERS

   5b. Is Communion ever a part of shared worship experiences? [34] YES [13] NO

6. Does the Cabinet eat meals together while in session?

   [24] always [14] often [9] sometimes [0] never

7. Has your Cabinet ever been on retreat together? [47] YES [1] NO

   7a. If yes, how often?

   [1] once [3] occasionally [25] annually [19] more than annually

   7b. What is the focus of Cabinet retreats (check all appropriate)

   [42] spiritual growth [27] personal growth [34] intellectual growth

   [27] recreation [16] rest [24] other

8. Has your Cabinet devised any ways to mark the entrance of new persons into the group? [36] YES [11] NO

   8a. If yes, briefly describe:

9. Has your Cabinet devised any ways to mark the exit of persons who are leaving the group? [39] YES [8] NO

   9a. If yes, briefly describe:

10. What rituals, customs and experiences strengthen the sense of community in your Cabinet?

The back of this sheet may be used for any additional comments, and your signature, if you wish. Thanks so much!

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This book is a discussion of Christian fellowship which grew directly out of the author's experience in the underground seminary established by the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany.

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Gibson, William E., A Covenant Group for Lifestyle Assessment. New York: United Presbyterian Program Agency, 1978.

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Jones, W. Paul, The Province Beyond the River. Nashville: The Upper Room (originally published by Paulist Press in 1981), 1986.

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